



House Magic: Bureau of Foreign Correspondence

zine catalogue of the exhibition on European Social Centers
at ABC No Rio in New York City

April 21 to May 7, 2009
volume one, Spring 2009

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of the exhibition on European Social Centers at ABC No Rio, New York
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The “House Magic” project was intended to introduce the social center movement into the U.S. through the form of an exhibition. It was assembled with very little time and almost no funds. But something was done, at ABC No Rio when “House Magic” represented several European social centers. We put up a gallery show and ran a film series with speakers. At the end of the run, “House Magic: Bureau of Foreign Correspondence” was packed up and taken to Queens, to become part of the University of Trash, an installation by Michael Cataldi and Nils Norman. There the research continues through August 3rd.

This is an assembling zine catalogue of some of the work in the spring of 2009. It was edited by Alan W. Moore in May, 2009.



From the “Occupations & Properties” blog January 25, 2009: <http://occuprop.blogspot.com/>

Why “House Magic”?

Greetings, friends and comrades! This blog is devoted to a project that begins its life called “Occupations and Properties.” It is dedicated to representing aspects of the international social center movement through a project exhibition beginning in New York City in April of 2009. This movement is of the left, generally resistant to the state and capital, and often anarchist identified. While the movement

has unfolded most clearly over decades in European countries, it has clear counterparts in the United States – including the first venue for “Occupations & Properties,” ABC No Rio on the Lower East Side – and direct implications for grassroots urban development throughout the inner cities of the U.S.

This project exhibition is initiated after my experience as a co-editor on Clayton Patterson, ed., “Resistance: A Radical Social and Political History of the Lower East Side” (2007). This book began as an anthology of texts on the squatter movement of the late 1980s and ‘90s on the LES, but over a few years evolved into a panoramic look at the radical past of the district. Patterson has been photographing the people and the changes there for decades, and extensively documented the squatter movement.

Many things became clear in the course of working on this book. Among these was that the events on the Lower East Side were heavily influenced by the models of the English, Dutch and German squatting movements. In doing a Lexis-Nexis journalism review for my essay in “Resistance,” I found nothing in the

U.S. press that dealt squarely with the movement. It was always treated as crime or riot, and never analyzed or explored by any mainstream journalist I could find.

Before working on the book "Resistance," I was already very aware of the positive power of direct action occupation activity from our group's "art squat" of a building on 123 Delancey Street in 1979-80. Called the "Real Estate Show," this action led to our being given the opportunity by the NYC administration to develop 156 Rivington Street as an art gallery and cultural center.

We in turn had been inspired by the group CHARAS who had occupied a former school building on East 9th Street and called it El Bohio. This group of Puerto Rican activists and literati came from a strong tradition of activist occupations, particularly by the Young Lords Party.

When I emerged from my graduate school bunker years later to survey the Lower East Side squatter scene in the early 1990s, Clayton Patterson and I did an art exhibition at the 13th Street squats where my artist friend Robert Parker, a charter member of the group "Rivington School," had an outdoor iron forge. Moving through the squats, I discovered nearly every one of them had an art gallery. I met Homeless Higgins, and Andrew Castrucci of Bullet Space, who produced the wonderful tabloid (and silkscreen poster edition) called "Your House Is Mine." Clayton and I produced the show, and a 'zine-style catalogue of it – and a group among the squatters produced an angry manifesto critiquing the representation of their struggle...

Just as it ought to be!

In 2006 I returned to Europe, to Berlin, after a 20 year absence. I was delighted to see the squats there – but a little disappointed that they were all kind of moribund... They, like their New York counterparts, had been given a deal with the city, and the whole movement had settled down. As I discovered on subsequent trips, this is not true elsewhere – particularly in Spain, where a radical social center movement has recently held its second annual meeting in Barcelona. "Network is coming," Krax declares, and I am hopeful that "House Magic" will begin the process of extending it, through the stories, lessons and examples from this movement, to the United States.



Hyperlinks in that blog entry:

Wikipedia definition of "social center" -- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_center

"Captured" trailer on YouTube -- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxUZSIf5yjQ>

link to "Resistance" book promotional event -- <http://slash.autonomedia.org/node/5549>

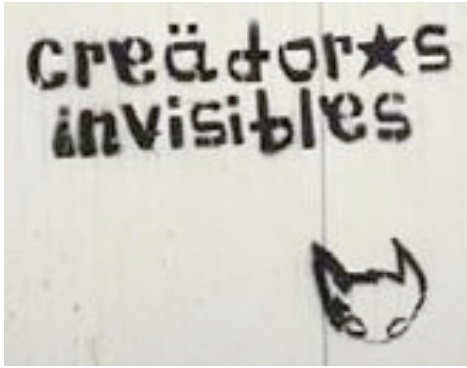
Real Estate Show press release, 1980 -- http://www.abcnorio.org/about/history/res_statement_80.html

a web project about the Young Lords -- <http://younglords.googlepages.com/>

Rivington School website -- <http://rivingtonschool.com/index.html>

Your House Is Mine: Bullet Space -- <http://www.bulletspace.org/>





This is some of the exhibition proposal for “House Magic: Bureau of Foreign Correspondence” made to the ABC No Rio Visual Arts Collective on January 24, 2009. The show was finally scheduled for April 21 to May 7, on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday noon-10pm.

SHOW PLAN

1. Bearing in mind that the exhibition space must be fully cleared for each Saturday punk show, and also for other events, the show is primarily to be based on pictures and text.
2. Banners announcing occupations from around the world will be copied onto cheap cloth in full size, hung on the front of the building when finished, then stacked in front of the gallery.
3. Soup and bread will be available during every public event – speakers, screenings, discussion circles, etc.
4. ‘Zines and other items related to the social center movement will be available for sale or trade in una Tienda de las Okupas.
5. The show will include an online component as yet undefined – commencing with a blog (URL TK), and including a board for “dispatches” that come in, are printed out, and posted.

This proposal was accepted, and the form of the show was determined. It consisted of stencils of different social centers, spray-painted onto the wall; boards with photocopied images of social centers, their propaganda and activities; and clipboards with materials relating to several different social centers in different countries. (Most of this material is on the website, <https://sites.google.com/site/housemagicbfc>.)

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Chronologically transcription from the Social Center session at City from Below conference in Baltimore in late March should be here. The tape was not available in time to be transcribed for this edition

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A version of the “House Magic” show was prepared and carried to Chicago for Version 9 in later April, an arts festival produced by a coalition of arts groups. This is the explanatory wall text:

Explanatory Wall Text

“House Magic: Bureau of Foreign Correspondence”
information exhibition at ABC No Rio, NYC 4/21 – 5/7; then to Queens Sculpture Center, University of
Trash 5/10 – 8/3/09

This ‘suitcase’ show looks at the squatted social centers which have sprung up in cities throughout Europe. These social centers arose out of direct action squatting. Squatting is mainly associated with the need of poor folk for housing. The occupation actions that lead to the establishment of social centers are less about housing. They have been undertaken in order to create social, cultural and political space for action in the city.

Much social center squatting is a response to gentrifying development in the city, an instance of “bottom up planning and architecture.” This is a kind of urban development from below, undertaken without money, only with labor. Social centers in Europe are usually well integrated into the neighborhoods in which they are set up, and provide free space for cultural activities to take place. Many social centers work closely with immigrant groups, organizing, supporting and demonstrating to protect their rights.

The social centers represent a new wave of activism, often highly theorized, with participation by both radical intellectuals and grassroots activists. Increasingly architects, urban planners and artists are joining political activists in this movement.

The form of the social center has deep historical roots in modernist political movements, including post-revolutionary Russia and Republican Spain. Public social centers in occupied vacant buildings were a key feature of the Italian Autonomist movement of the 1970s and '80s. Squats on the Lower East Side of New York City in the 1990s borrowed elements of the English and German social center models, including cafes, library/bookstores, performance spaces and art galleries. These models also influenced the “infoshops” of the anarchist movement throughout the U.S.A. Across Europe, the often short-lived social centers became important organizing foci of the global justice movement during the first decade of the new century.

In presenting this work to the public, ABC No Rio has sought to privilege self-representations of social centers worldwide, past and present, rather than to interpret and “represent” this movement ourselves. We have assembled an array of pictures, texts, videos, books and zines, posters, stencil designs, and other media that express the special experiences of collective work to open, build and sustain these centers.

This is a process exhibition. That means it is not finished when it opens, but is a continuous process of becoming. “House Magic” is the first step in an ongoing project which invites public participation as we share the stories and synthesize the lessons of the vivid life and often spectacular deaths of these temporary autonomous zones.

references:

“Social Center” on Wikipedia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_center
“House Magic: BFC” wiki
<https://sites.google.com/site/housemagicbfc>
blog of the show, called “Occupations and Properties”
<http://occuprop.blogspot.com>

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The heart of the show at ABC No Rio was the evening events, film screenings with some speakers. This is the program from those evenings:

Schedule of Screenings and Talks

“House Magic: Bureau of Foreign Correspondence”

The social center movement in Europe is the focus of a project exhibition at the Lower East Side cultural center ABC No Rio. Images and info, videos and discussion engage this vital urban movement. Evening events are a kind of impromptu film festival very much subject to change. But you can come in during the day, and we’ll show you your choice of what is on hand.

APRIL - FIRST WEEK

Tuesday 21 - Guest: Michel Chevalier, Hamburg

Discusses “ARCHIV kultur & soziale bewegung” interventions in cultural conflicts in Berlin, and commissions of international squat documentaries from Forde (Geneva) and La Générale (Paris). North American premiere of 30 min. documentary film ‘Forde, un squat a Genève.’

Wednesday 22 - United Kingdom

“Take Over,” directed by Jordie Montevecchi

The film follows a group of Brighton, UK, squatters who take over an old church. North American premiere.

Thursday 23 - Netherlands, Amsterdam

“The City Was Ours,” by Joost Seelen (time?; 1996; Dutch with English subtitles), on the Amsterdam squatting movement, 1970s to 1980s; “Docu van kraakmuseum ‘Zwarte Kat’” -- an elaborate, dark Dutch joke about a squat museum: “Although the sun is shining/ the Black Cat is crying/ because she is dying ...” All in Dutch, but it’s an action film. [regrettably, we could not get this film]

SECOND WEEK

Tuesday 28 - Spain, Barcelona

Octavi Royo, “Okupa, Crónica de una Lucha Social” [Spanish & Catalan with English subtitles] Reflexión sobre el fenómeno de la okupación que empieza con el desalojo del Cine Princesa en Barcelona (1996) y termina en la actualidad; Dara Greenwald “Tactical Tourist” [English]; selected bangin' shorts from “Resistir es Crear: 10 años junto al Centro Social - Casa de Iniciativas de Málaga”

Guests: Dara Greenwald, others

Wednesday 29 - Spain, Madrid

“Laboratorio 3, Ocupando el Vacio” (2007; Spanish with English subtitles), a dramatic initiative in the old city of Madrid; short subjects.

Thursday 30 - Italy

Oliver Ressler and Dario Azzellini, “Disobbedienti,” 54 min., Ital./Ger./Engl., 2002

MAY

THIRD WEEK

Tuesday 5 - communal living

“Visions of Utopia,” directed by Geoff Kozeny; Part One, the historical background (94 min.; 2009); and excerpts from Part Two, on urban communes Two (about 30 min); discussion with James Andrews of Nsumi, other invitees

Wednesday 6 - Zurich

“Dada Changed My Life,” directed by Lou Lou and Daniel Martinez (2004; time?) about the Zurich art squatting action that saved the Cabaret Voltaire Guest: Olga Mazurkiewicz

Thursday 7 - Denmark, Copenhagen

“Christiania You Have My Heart,” directed by Nils Vest (62 min.; 1991; Danish with English subtitles) talk with Rebecca Zorach

A rotating selection of videos will be playing in the gallery, including the following artists’ documentaries: Oliver Ressler -- “Disobbedienti,” 54 min., Ital./Ger./Engl., 2002 {with Dario Azzellini}; and “What Would It Mean To Win?” 40 min. / 2008 / PAL / Engl./Ger./French (with Zanny Begg), Marcelo Expósito, “Primero de Mayo (La Ciudad-fábrica) [First of May (The City Factory)]” (61 minutes, 2004) Span./Engl.

This schedule of events was compiled for purely logistical reasons. I shall follow it to sequence social center material by country in the following sections.

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**KONFERENCA EVROPSKIH
SOCIALNIH CENTROV**
Socialni center Rog, Ljubljana
www.tovarna.org www.njetwork.org



In the following pages are some very few pages from a comprehensive exhibition prepared by [Michael and Andreas their names here] about the New Yorck Bethanien initiative. More of this material is posted on our website at: <https://sites.google.com/site/housemagicbfc>

KAMPF- KOMITEE BETHANIEN

ZEITUNG NR.4

Preis: 30 Pfennige

Inhalt:

- Ein Arzt aus dem Urban berichtet: S.2 Die ÖTV auf der Seite der Bonzen.....S.10
Kranken Kindern kann nicht geholfen werden Ein Arzt berichtet:
Wie ergreift es einen Arbeiter, der krank wird? S.3 So sieht es in der Praxis aus.....S.16
Warum ich im Kampfkomitee mitarbeite...S.5 Wie geht der Kampf weiter?.....S.19
Wie die SPD Kreuzberg "rettet".....S.6 Kinderpolitik oder Kinderkonzern?...S.17
Bericht vom Kongreß für eine ausreichende medizinische Versorgung d. Werktätigen S.8



What is what?

The texts you find here are about different aspects about the Bethanien/NewYork and the history of Kreuzberg. At other exhibitions we printed them out on A4 for handouts and fotocopied them to A3 for hanging on the wall. The photos, posters and flyers are only a small part of our exhibition because the most is not digitalized.

bethanien:

bethanien_building:

different photos of the bethanien-building

bethanien_ensemble_zwischenboene:

several photos and poster, flyer etc. the programmeflyer is in english, there is also an animation-eg photos of the bethanien in 70s and today
In 2005 the ensemble zwischenboene, a group of modern musicians under leading of american Bill Dietz, supported by John Tibbary and Aleks Kolkowski gave a solidarity concert for the NewYork with music of Cornelius Cardew, a famous british musician, composer and political activist. It was the seventieth birthday of Cardew, who was in Berlin in the 70s and fought against the Artist Home and for a children hospital in the Bethanien. He died in 1981. The concert was followed by a discussion about radical arts and politics with John Tibbary, a close friend and comrade of Cardew and a famous pianist/producer. (see also text Bethanien in the 70's, p.13)

bethanien_in_front_of_the_squat:

photos from the place in the front of the entrance of the former squatted part of Bethanien

The place is used for openair concerts, free food and coffe and cake on sundays, information and agitation to the public

bethanien_inside:

photos from inside NewYork

A photo of the first day of squatting with the mayor of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg and wellknown „greenleft“ politician Streubel, photos of events for children

bethanien_meetings_agitation:

photos from agitation and meetings

to inform the public about the Bethanien, collecting signatures for the Bürger_innenbegehren (petition) for a social centre Bethanien

bethanien_zaf:

photos, poster and flyer

The ARI (Antirassistische Initiative) organised an event „Zwischen allen Fronten“ (Between All Frontiers) to show the situation of refugees in Germany. Several antiracist groups were involved, there were discussions, music, art-installation, movies and free food.

posters_flyers:

atelier_populaire_poster.pdf

Poster for an exhibition about posters of May 68, Paris

bethanien_a_new_concept_flyer.pdf

bethanien_a_new_concept_poster.pdf

Poster and flyer for event where we showed our concept for a cultural centre to the public

christiana_flyer.pdf

christiana_poster.pdf

Information and movie about the „Protesten Christiania“ Kopenhagen

demo_against_renting_gentrification.pdf

Poster demonstration against renting gentrification

flyer_2006_christmas.pdf
kiescafe_poster_cake_contest.pdf

For a long time we had a neighborhood cafe on sundays with different events from politics to cakecontests

klosterffen_neighborhood_meeting10.pdf
klosterffen_neighborhood_meeting11.pdf
Neighborhood meetings on different issues

newyork_party_20070302.pdf
newyork_party_20071218.pdf
newyork_summerparty2008.pdf
Party posters

newyork_we_stay.pdf
On certain times the threat of eviction was very dense, a poster to show we won't go without trouble

sink_mediaspree:

Logo of the campaign „Sink Mediaspree“, different posters
Mediaspree is a „towndevelopment“ area at the banks of the river spree between Kreuzberg an Friedrichshain. There are not many buildings on the banks because they were the former border between East- and West-Berlin. Different big players, with the help of their friends in the politics, want to build a „Mediaspree“ with 2,4 billions Euro. This means gentrification at its best, so its no wonder that the protest against it under the label „Mediaspree versenken“ (Sink Mediaspree) is widespread. Meetings, demonstrations, blockades of the river to stop investors on sightseeing, or a blockade of the VIP-opening of the „Q2-World“ of investor Phillip Anschutz. (see also text history of Kreuzberg, p. 7)

squat_in_mediaspree_french_squatters.pdf
Squatters from Paris told about their actions

we_need_money_ad.pdf
we_need_money_flyer.pdf
we_need_money_poster.pdf
Different media to find people supporting the NewYorck after the squatting time is over as we have to pay rent

kreuzberg:

70s_80s:

different photos of 70s and 80s in Kreuzberg, the comic says: stones are not an argument

90s:

Photos of the squatted houses in the Mainzerstraße, before and after the eviction (see also text history of Kreuzberg, p. 7)

nowadays:

demo_1st_mai.JPG
there is along tradition of „revolutionary demonstrations“ in Kreuzberg at May, 1st with around 80.000 people.

demo_against_mediaspree.JPG
One of a lot of demonstrations against Mediaspree

investorblockade_river_spree.JPG
blockade of the river to stop investors on sightseeing

keep_autonomous_centre.JPG
Wellknown autonomous space all over Europe

living_carnival.JPG
living_carnival.JPG
living_carnival.JPG
Normal life in Kreuzberg

protest_against_q2_opening.JPG
Blockade of the VIP-opening of the „Q2-World“ of investor Phillip Anschutz



The NewYorck at Bethanien - A space for emancipatory projects

The political house project „NewYorck“ starts to exist one week after the eviction of one of the oldest house projects in Berlin, the „Yorck 59“ by the brutal action of more than 500 policemen and -women. Since June 2005 now the „NewYorck“ exists in the southern part of the Bethanien building.

A special characteristic is the collective living alongside the working together politically and culturally. This happens on the basis of self-organisation and common values. We all think that there should not be space in our house for racism and antisemitism, sexism, homophobia, for social exclusion and violence between people. We understand ourself as a political project, that always tries not to accept the poor reality of current capitalism, but to intervene and to change the world – beginning here in the front of the house, but knowing that we are part of a worldwide movement.

We never take decisions by majority but always seek a consensus. There is a plenary meeting of all people and projects each month, where not only the technical details of living and working together are decided, but also current political questions are debated. Nobody should be excluded for economic reasons. The mixture of living space and public space help us to realize this: at least a part of the rent of the public space can be payed by the people who live in the project.

NewYorck: some groups and projects

01

Main points of work of the documentation-group of the Anti-racist Initiative are research and publication of the effects of national and social coercion on refugees. Recently, the 16th edition of the documentation „Refugee Politics of the German Federal Republic and its deadly consequences“ was published. This unique documentation covers the years from 1993-2008 and documents more than 5000 cases of violence and repression against refugees in Germany, and therefore constitutes an important point of reference for people working with refugees or in the area of migration policy.

Various self-organized migrant and refugee groups meet here regularly and use the room for preparing political actions and campaigns. Ex-Plataforma, The VOICE, and the Oury-Jalloh-Initiative are only a few of the bigger ones. Other focus on organizing regular political and cultural events, such as the Latinokino and Solidarité.



NewYorck: some groups and projects

02

The **Glocal office** was a major point in organizing the resistance to Heiligendamm07, now it is used by various anticapitalist and antimilitarist groups, e.g. **Carambolage** (a PGA collective) and **BAMM**, the office for antimilitarist measures, both supporting the current Anti-NATO-actions.

An important focus of some groups in the NewYorck are issues at the local level of the city and city district. So the initiatives **Spreepirat_innen** and **Mediaspree versenken!** fight against the gentrification of Kreuzberg-Friedrichshain, and in particular of the riverside of the Spree. While the former focus on street actions and more radical protests from below, e.g. against the new event hall O2-Arena, the latter organized a overwhelmingly successful plebiscite in summer 2008 and slowed down the commercial development process of the area. Increasing rents and luxury apartments in the neighbourhood started to be a really important topic in late 2008. The related displacement of residents is a subject of the **Kampagne gegen Zwangsumzüge** (Campaign against forced (flat) removals), which organizes, among others, a telephone hotline.

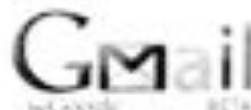
The **Initiative for the Future of Bethanien** (IZB) started the campaign for the local plebiscite against the privatisation of Bethanien and for the development of the building as a center from below (the plebiscite was successful, more than 14,000 signatures were presented to the local government). Together with the **regional group of the Mietshäusersyndikat** (an anticapitalist support-network of house and cultural projects) and the **Anarchist Federation of Berlin** (AFB) all these initiatives constitute the 'city district office'.

Discussion and education are the focus of groups such as **reflect!**, an association that works on the self-organization of people from teaching and science, and **b.o.n.e.**, that organize reading circles and film- and discussion events.

The rooms are big enough for doing sports or practising theatre in small groups, e.g. for the local **Rebel Clown Army**, or various political street theatre groups. Beyond this, diverse emancipatory political groups use the rooms for regular or spontaneous meetings or activities, on a daily basis.

The **DruzBar** is a non-commercial place where food, drinks and cocktails are sold at low prices, for the benefit of political groups, often combined with political information, concerts or films. The **Anarchist Info-Café** takes place twice or three times a month and focuses on diverse political issues (Social history, employer-employee relationships etc.).

Solidarity parties and - concerts are organized by different political groups to raise funds and inform about their work.



Joyce Manalo <joyce.manalo@gmail.com>

House Magic @ ABC No Rio, NYC

Joyce Manalo <joyce.manalo@gmail.com>

Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 9:26 PM

To: yorck59bleibt@gmx.net, andreas@wunderwelt.com

Hallo Michael and Andreas,

Thank you for sending us your materials. It is very organized and we look forward to representing Bethanien / NewYorck / Yorck59. We have pushed the project to commence on Tuesday, April 21.

I would like to extend myself in correspondence with you for the duration of the project, while it is in ABC No Rio. Do you care to engage in this exchange?

Note: I've never been to Berlin. The two places I went to in Germany was this little town, Hassloch and Baden-Baden. Forgive me if my questions appear to be unsophisticated.

STUPID QUESTION:

First and foremost, do you allow us to reproduce images, logos, posters, ephemera, photographs, video, sound, e-mail correspondence for the purpose of representing your social center in "House Magic"?

Can you send me a file for your logo, a map that delineates East and West Berlin, (found this, <http://www.berlin.de/mauer/lorenzuebergaenge/friedrichstrasse/index.en.php> - need a better one to illustrate your current location with old city line territory). and a music file for the "If you stay on your own you'll be destroyed" by Ton, Steine, Scherben song? Would be great to play it on Tuesday night during our VoKu.

BIG PICTURE QUESTIONS:

1. Present day, how do people commonly refer to the space, Bethanien, NewYorck, or Yorck59? (Did I get all the names spelled and punctuated correctly?) In my research, the initial squat refers to the most latter, Yorck59, the NewYorck is the revitalization of the squat through insider donation campaigns. So what about referring to your space as Bethanien? According to your text, it seems that the entirety of the building is an alternative space that houses art, culture, social and political groups. Can you give a brief explanation?
2. Instantbesetzung (maintenance by squatting) is how most buildings become "occupied". I don't think we had one word to describe it like your German word does. It is amazing to think that there were 167 squatted houses in Berlin and 86 of them were in Kreuzberg. What is the current breakdown of squats in Berlin and in Kreuzberg?
3. What are your thoughts on the system's invocation of "legalization or eviction"? Which parts made sense and which ones were B.S.?
4. Where either of you squatting in the south wing during the raid caused by G8 summit in Helligendamm of 2007? If so, what was that like? If not, what were you thinking at that time?
5. Do you know what phase the MediaSpree plan is at? I understand that the physical and historical location of Bethanien is key in opposing this development. How long have you been actively resisting their commercial efforts? Do you think it will escalate to a point where violence will ensue? Is the Bethanien prepared with its conflict resolution?



Michel Chevalier at ABC No Rio: Hamburg and Berlin

Michel came from Hamburg to visit and talk about his work there. An American, he is tri-lingual. He gave a talk at Bluestockings Books on April 20th, considering a text by Lucy Lippard (see description below). The next day he spoke at ABC No Rio for the "House Magic" show about his work with the Archiv »Kultur & Soziale Bewegung« ("Culture and Social Movement" Archive).

His description:

Germany -- Guest: Michel Chevalier, Hamburg [<http://targetautonopop.org>]

Archiv »Kultur & Soziale Bewegung« (Hamburg/Berlin) member Michel Chevalier presents this group's intervention/contribution during the Berlin conflict that pit the art-space Künstlerhaus Bethanien against the squatters at IZB/NewYorck in 2006. On that occasion Archiv »Kultur & Soziale Bewegung« commissioned documentary videos from the squats Forde (Geneva) and La Générale (Paris), and the filmmakers came up to Berlin to discuss their perspectives with the New Yorck activists, and collectively tackle this broader question: are 'contemporary art' and democracy irreconcilably at odds?

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This is a partial transcription of Michel Chevalier's talk on Hamburg and Berlin: First, Michel showed a film, "Rhino féroce," which his group had commissioned. Then there was a discussion of the subject, the social center Rhino in Zurich. (See Zurich, Switzerland for a partial transcript of this talk.)

Michel resumed, talking about the Rote Flora in Hamburg. Rote Flora is not a residential squat. It's a culture center. The Rote Flora is located in what was once a counter-cultural neighborhood but is now totally gentrified. They are also a thorn in the side of the Christian Democratic conservative parties that took power in 2001. The SPD labor party had ruled in Hamburg for 40 years. The current mayor, Ole von Beust, used to talk to the press out front of the Rote Flora when he was running for office, saying 'I'm going to tear this building down. As soon as I'm in office it's going to be over.' [Details of the real estate transactions around the building.] Thomas [who is responsible for the beautiful events announcement posters exhibited at ABC and in the Sculpture Center] is a member of the silkscreen group at the Rote Flora, which has done a lot of political printing. Thomas also organizes concerts. There are a few jokes here. This one is printed on the real estate page of the newspaper, and the text is printed backwards. During the G8 demonstrations at Heiligendamm last year, the police raided many squats. They soldered the door of the Rote Flora. So this poster [a portable grinding wheel, used to reopen the door] is a poster for an anti-repression party. The one with the remote control, the static is the person who is holding it. The one for concerts in the shape of a bandage – [Monika explained which this joke might be, as the "plaster" or bandage of a partial solution to the housing crisis]. The other one is of a tick, and is captioned "Rote Flora 'ticks' regularly." [Again, Monika suggested that this could be based on a characterization by right wing politicians of the squats as parasites on society – so, as the poster says, the Rote Flora "ticks" regularly with their activities.]

Question from Jack Waters about the Hafenstrasse squat.

Michel: That is no longer a squat. It is a housing project, changed after negotiations in 1986 arranged by a real estate developer who is also very active in the Hamburg art scene. Jochen

Waitz is a member of the neoliberal FDP party. He is old money. He worked for a New York firm called Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer. He intervened in another art project called Westwerk which was under threat of being sold by the city. It was an artist-run project. So Waitz 'saved the day' by taking control (buying the property after the original Dutch investor was scared away thanks to the artists' successful info campaign) and bringing in many commercial galleries. Waitz is a real estate developer and also a big art collector. I just wrote an article about him.

Michel resumes, talking about his work with Archiv »Kultur & Soziale Bewegung«, the Culture and Social Movement Archive. The group is comprised of art people, media activists, and graduate students who go to political events and bring a lot of material like videos, books, and workshops. During questions, Michel expanded on the work of the AKSB. People were complaining that the social forums were becoming boring. The cultural presentations at social forums were very stereotypical. So we wanted to present things that were more interesting. We wanted to present more historical material, to counteract the amnesia. We had stuff about the Russian Revolution, the Russian avant-garde of the '20s, about Dada, about Situationists. We have music and video.

In 2006 the AKSB group met people from the Yorck squat in Bethanien in Berlin at the Social Forum in Erfurt. They said they wanted us to do something with them. We developed a program. A squat on the street called Yorck 59 was evicted in 2005, and they immediately settled into part of the old hospital complex called Bethanien in Kreuzberg – hence "New Yorck." [See the section on this squat in this zine.] Some neighbors there were also squatters, the Rauch Haus [which was established in the 1970s; during my visit in 2006, I saw also a Bauwagenplatz, or area where house trailers were parked, within the Bethanien grounds –ed.]. There is also an art center called Künstlerhaus Bethanien, which during the 1970s and '80s was famously experimental. But in the 1990s, they started becoming much more art market oriented and socially conservative. For example, they used to have an open call residency program. That changed so that only embassies of countries could suggest people. They became sponsored by Philip-Morris. What they do now is very

conventional art market fare. [Michel shows some of the art on their website.] The guy that runs the Künstlerhaus became angry that squatters were his neighbors, and he launched a campaign against them. He got signatures from prominent people in the Berlin art scene, and corporate sponsors. This is their petition [shows the document online], which states “we the Künstlerhaus protest against the self-empowerment of the squatters and their sympathizers. They plan to turn Bethanien into a playing field of ideological class war.” Among the signators we have the director of the art program at Daimler Chrysler, and the Berlin art fair, but also some “left” people from the official art scene (Leonie Baumann, Ute Meta Bauer). This bunch of people joined the Künstlerhaus in attacking the squatters and saying they have to go because they are a threat to culture.

Michel speaks of a screening he did at the NY Bethanien of Newsreel film works from the 1960s about the fight against the Lincoln Center, where 20,000 low-income families were displaced. The New York group the Motherfuckers did an action which was filmed in which they brought garbage up to Lincoln Center in a satirical “cultural exchange.” We showed this film (“Garbage”) to show that there are precedents for an artistic critique on self-declared cultural projects that actually represent the interests of capitalists. We also showed a film about the People’s Park in Berkeley in 1969, about massive police repression of space that had been occupied. We did this event, and then got a very aggressive review by Jörg Sundermeier in a left-oriented newspaper, the Berliner Tageszeitung (taz). It was quite sarcastic, describing the New York Bethanien as looking like the sociology department of a leftist university, with stupid

slogans and flyers, and the obligatory portrait of Rosa Luxembourg. The critique continues, the audience was only leftist activists, and no people from the cultural scene, which is against this squat. The Newsreel films operate according to the all too simple poor-rich dichotomy. The NYB squatters are against the wall. They are trying to do events, but they can’t do them well because they have no budget. So all they can do is film themselves.

In fact, we had people filming from the BBC, and people from Geneva and Paris. So we wrote a response to the paper which was not printed. The guy who wrote this critique is a publisher of art catalogues. My suspicion is that he was doing a service to the Künstlerhaus people by doing a hatchet job on us.

Michel discusses the position of the NGBK, the only artist-run contemporary art center in Germany. The building has been purchased by a real estate investor who “buys the walls of all the spaces where there is art” – in other words, buys buildings with art galleries in them.

Michel Chevalier, «target: autonopop», Hamburg, Germany

Further details on these actions is available on the web at <http://targetautonopop.org> website for the archive: <http://www.archiv.glizz.net>

[To editorialize here: I record this in detail, since I think it is a disturbing instance of a direct conflict between art institutions historically hospitable to the avant garde, and self-organized politicized squatters. It shows how completely a neoliberal agenda – the market only is what counts – has infiltrated art institutions. During the question period, the conversation turned to New York City, and was quite interesting. I hope in a future number of this zine to transcribe that part also.]

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A description of Michel’s talk a day before at Bluestockings Books relates to this question: Reading Lippard’s “Rejecting Retrochic” 30 years later: Subsequent developments and possible sequels. Published in the Village Voice in December 1979 [and reprinted in Lippard, Get the Message], Lucy Lippard’s humorous and provocative treatment of those alibis for quietist withdrawal that were (and still are) endemic to the art world(s) is still powerful today... and also raises issues relative to the responsibilities of artists and the finalities of art that “institution-critical” 1990s artists effectively brushed aside. High time, then, to return to this text. We will closely read a few passages, discuss the backlash that followed Lippard’s essay in the 80s, and consider newer forms and initiatives that have since tried to make good on art’s critical “eye opening” effects and power to undermine arbitrary restrictions and hierarchies.



installation by the Archiv »Kultur & Soziale Bewegung« at Social Forum in New Yorck Bethanien, Berlin, Germany, 2006

We just overhauled the bookshop!! We got lots of new titles in: These range from new books about Anarchist theory to struggles from round the world to eco theory and practice to punk rock to graphic novels to interesting thinkers like Badiou, Deleuze, Negri etc. Always about 30% less than in the big shops!!



56a INFOSHOP: yes! we sell things too!



The 56a Infoshop is a 100% unfunded volunteer run space. Inside its crammed social space, is the bookshop part of the building. Here we sell a wide range of items to you, the discerning visitor...

BOOKS and PAMPHLETS:

ON:

ANARCHISM
FEMINISM
ECOLOGICAL
ANTI-CAPITALISM
SITUATIONIST
AUTONOMIST

NEWSPAPERS and MAGAZINES:

INCLUDING:

CLASS WAR
GREEN ANARCHY (USA)
ORGANISE
MAXIMUM ROCK n ROLL
PROPANE
EXISTENCE
DIRECT ACTION
LAST HOURS
CARBUSTERS

T-SHIRTS and STRIPEY SOCKS



RECORDS and CD's:



ACTIVE DISTRIBUTION runs our CD and RECORD stock:

OTHER SUNDRY ITEMS

OTHER FABULOUS STUFF...

• CHOCOLATE
• BRUKMAN SCARVES (*)
• PATCHES
• RAINCOATS

Communique from RampART Social Centre, April 2009

On the Thursday, 2nd of April, following the G20 protests, two squatted social centres in East London were raided by riot police, apparently looking for instigators of the attacks on the Royal Bank of Scotland. RampART Social Centre, which has existed for more than four years, and a newly opened Convergence Centre in Earl Street were both being used to house and feed protesters throughout the period of the G20 summit. In both cases, the police acted illegally but,

other than a brief report in the Independent which referred to unwarranted violence, the raids remained largely unreported. In both buildings, people were subjected to physical violence and verbal abuse and those that were arrested were later 'de-arrested' for lack of any supporting evidence. Our only 'crime', it seems, is that we are political activists and squatters and thus deemed to be suitable targets. If only we had kept our heads down and stayed away from these kinds of activities, the logic goes, we would not deserve what we had coming.

It is right and proper that the events leading up to the death of Ian Tomlinson should be the subject of a criminal investigation but the danger, as we see it, is that it will be seen as an isolated incident and will be dealt with simply by disciplining individual officers, only serving to further obscure the role of the police in perpetuating a climate of fear. Under the terms of the global surveillance state, citizenship has become an exercise in evading a charge of deviance. In fact, the proliferation of forms of deviance is the flip side of the supposed 'lifestyle choices' available under the terms of consumer citizenship. You can 'choose' to spend your money on home improvements, high fashion and high-tech gadgets and are applauded for making the 'right' choices. But if you choose to occupy an unused building for the purposes of providing space for political discussion, self-education and creative activities without the intrusion of CCTV cameras, or access restrictions, and particularly if you refuse to levy a charge which situates these activities in terms of market forces, then you effectively become outlaw. And, if you choose to express your outrage at a system that produces inequalities and then condemns those that become unemployed and homeless, you become a target for repression. The differences between Tomlinson and the people who went to the Bank of England to demonstrate against the iniquitous excesses of neoliberal capitalism are marginal, despite attempts to distinguish between 'innocent' bystanders and 'guilty' protesters. Tomlinson was on his way home from work. The demonstrators were exercising their lawful right to protest. Both were exercising their right to the city as citizens of a supposed democracy.

When RampART social centre was raided on the Thursday, members of the volunteer collective were sitting down to a cup of coffee and biscuits. Other members were elsewhere in the building speaking to some guests who had come to stay for the duration of the protests. We were aware of the massing of officers outside the building but were used to the presence of a Forward Intelligence Team, the police paparazzi, who had been frequent visitors to Rampart Street in the weeks leading up to the G20, photographing and scrutinising anyone entering the building. And so, for us, it was business as usual in what has become disturbingly normal for peaceful protesters almost anywhere now--if you are taking part in a political

protest, prepare to be treated like criminals and get ready for invasive surveillance.

At the Convergence Centre, the police seemed to be employing a new tactic whereby people being searched before entering the building had their mobile phones confiscated and were threatened with arrest unless they could 'prove ownership'. Essentially, this amounted to an attempt to illegally secure personal details.

The raid itself was surreal. Or rather, it was hyperreal, in the sense that, as some of us commented later, it was like being on the wrong side of a 'first person shooter' video game. Some of us thought the men and women in balaclavas, padded uniforms, helmets and carrying riot shields were pointing toy guns at us. In fact, as we discovered later, they were tasers, which are designed to stun but are occasionally known to kill.

It's tempting to say that the violence that we experienced was out of all proportion to the level of resistance which was, in fact, zero. But to even speak of proportionality is a mistake, because it implies that there is something in our actions that warrants a violent response. One member of the collective was punched in the face, another was pushed downstairs, had his head smashed against the wall and was met with looks of disbelief when he pleaded with officers to protect his glasses. One of the residents of the building was punched and kicked, narrowly avoided taser fire and was arrested in his pyjamas.

We would stress again that this happened to people who, like Ian Tomlinson, were simply exercising their most basic civil rights: to congregate peacefully with friends and to walk the streets unmolested. Some might think that we are opportunistically linking what happened to us with Tomlinson, and would want to make a clear distinction. After all, he was a regular bloke in the wrong place at the wrong time, and we were deliberately taking part in political activism. But to continue in this vein is to lose all semblance of what it means to live with even a modicum of freedom and self-respect.

The press reported that four (and, in some reports, six) arrests had been made during the raids on RampART and the Convergence Space. Two known to us personally were held in police cells for up to ten hours, had their clothes confiscated and were sent home in Guantanamo Bay style boiler suits. News of arrests functions to assuage anxiety and to justify the cost of police operations that amount to little more than exercises in public relations. The public can rest assured that the dangerous anarchists have been infiltrated and detained and that 'scroungers' and 'cheats' have been brought to book.

Such desperate actions by the police made us wonder why were we targeted in this way, what was the real rationale for such an extravagant use of police resources, including the deployment of the F450

photo of
Spanish “mani”
(demonstration)
by Miguel
Martinez

military-style armoured vehicle. Beyond the specifics of the G20 protests, this raid is a part of a larger pattern where peaceful occupations with intention of opening up a space beyond the constraints of capitalism are ruthlessly smashed down. It seems pretty clear that the values of capitalist society are so fragile that our actions are considered to pose a serious threat. Following the G20, the Governor of the Bank of England, the Lord Mayor and a number of financial institutions paid tribute to officers from the Metropolitan Police for a job well done.

Comparisons have inevitably been made between Tomlinson’s death and the death of Blair Peach during an Anti-Nazi League demonstration in April, 1979, widely speculated to be as a result of assault by the police. Although Peach’s brother reached an out-of-court settlement with the Metropolitan Police in 1989, no officer was ever charged in connection with the death. Thirty years later, the same police force has been granted unprecedented powers in the name of ‘security’ and justified on the basis that London is under threat from elements in the population that threaten ‘our’ way of life. The result is the proliferation of deviant identities which function as a focus for collective anxiety and paranoia (‘terrorists’, ‘anarchists’, ‘squatters’, ‘foreign workers’ etc.).

Since the incidents on the 1st and 2nd of April, voices have been raised in condemnation of police actions, particularly the tactic of “kettling” which herds protesters like cattle and allows the police to punish those who attempt to escape. Back at RampART on the Wednesday evening we saw the resulting head injuries and beaten bodies. If we are to avoid more deaths and injury, then we need to think seriously, not only about the powers granted to a police force that seems



dangerously out of control but about the ideology that sanctions violence in the name of respectability. We need to think about what it means to be a citizen in 21st century global culture and about the treatment of those that effectively have their human rights revoked because they refuse, or are unable to conform to the dictates of consumer citizenship. We need, in short, to be aware that, as the global downturn deprives people of their homes and livelihoods, any one of us could end up on the wrong side of the divide that separates ‘us’ from ‘them’. Any one of us could become a scapegoat for the unfocused anger which results when people relinquish responsibility for their own lives and then find themselves deprived of their freedom and dignity. Places like RampART exist because some of us believe that we can reclaim our freedoms but only if we work together in a spirit of mutual respect and toleration. Contact: rampart@mutualaid.org

photo of Spanish “mani” by Miguel
Martinez

Micropolitics blog excerpts

Thinking in London had a great deal to do with the conception of "House Magic." Here is a sample of the activities of one gang I wish I'd been there for, the Micropolitics reading group, sometimes meeting at the RampART Social Centre. It is copied off a blog, so it moves in reverse chronological order. The posts are edited, with most details cut; what is left in is to give the gist, the method and the context of their work

The Micropolitics Research Group investigates the forces and procedures that entangle artistic production and the flexible subjectivities of its producers into the fabric of late capitalism. The prefix micro does not indicate 'small' or 'mere'. Nor does it assume a belief in the revolutionary potential of everyday life, or indicate a retreat into the inner life of the subject. Rather, it is invoked to access the registers of desire, vulnerability, affect and subjective implication that generate both artistic practices and the collective engines of cognitive capitalism. If current regimes of cultural and cognitive capitalism are predicated on subjective forces, on the collective production of knowledge and surplus creativity, how can artists begin to distinguish, let alone imagine a practice that does not merely feed and replicate the machine itself? How can art practices that in Suely Rolnik's words bring 'mutations of the sensible' into the realm of the visible or speakable, refuse or exit the limited field of possibility inscribed by late capitalism? Finally, if it is the very regimes of cognitive capitalism that not only capture but also produce flexible, creative subjectivities, how could we imagine a micropolitics of subjectivation? The research of the group will evolve from these core questions and will aim to investigate them through (a) theoretical analysis (b) the analysis of concrete situations of existing practice (c) the production of events and exhibitions.

December 8th 2008: * ME AND MY GROUP *

working session around group processes and configurations

6.30-9pm : session; 9-11pm : dinner

How do we position ourselves within the groups we work with, and what do we expect from different forms of collective work? how do we think group processes, and conceive of them in relation to social and political dimensions as well as psychic and individual becoming? where do our desires lie with groups? We believe that to develop a culture around the micropolitics of group ecologies is a particularly urgent step facing the managerial turn of contemporary power relations. We would like to reflect upon and look beyond the slightly tired formats of the "liberal debate" or the "teacher-student" situations implicit in so many group setups. We would like to think together about our experiences and ideas regarding collective becomings - both from the psycho-subjective point of view and with regards to the ways in which we organize our group processes (particularly in political and cultural contexts). In preparation for the session, during which we may experiment with some alternative discursive formats, we would like to suggest the following short texts, which have been translated informally for the purpose of our meeting (for full texts, see "temp texts links" page on this blog):

Gilbert Simondon, Individual and social time; Interiority groups and exteriority groups, in: L'individuation collective at les fondements du transindividuel, Ed Millon, Paris, 2005, p.293-295
David Vercauteren (with Thierry Muller and Olivier Crabbè), Micropolitiques des Groupes; Pour une écologie des pratiques collectives, HB Editions, 2007, pp.39-44

This session will be facilitated by Manuela Zechner and Valeria Graziano.

Monday November 17th 2008

* FAITH * CRISIS * FUTURES *

meeting at the Knights Templar Pub (former Union Bank of London)

How did we come to put so much faith and trust in bankers and other managers of finance capital, think of the future in terms of speculation and investment, and ultimately see economic growth as synonymous with our own best interests? How have these become hegemonic common sense and what is the role of emotions in this process: faith, trust, hope, anxiety and fear?

The session will be lead by Kirsten Forkert, Janna Graham and Francesco Salvini. We will be reading from the following texts:

JF Pixley 'Beyond Twin Deficits: Emotions of the Future in the Organization of Money', American Journal of Economics and Sociology, Oct 1999
Nikolas Rose, 'Inventing Ourselves: Psychology, Power and Personhood', Cambridge, 1998
Christian Marazzi. Measure and Value (excerpts)
Foucault, M. Hermeneutics of the Subject. Palgrave Macmillan. 2001 p.463-473.

Micropolitics Autumn 08

THE SENSIBLE AT WORK

Micropolitics Mondays Beginning 13 October 6:30 PM

Building on lessons learned from past visitors, Suely Rolnik, Brian Holmes and Franco Berardi, this year, the Micropolitics group will take it slowly. Departing from our drifts, narratives and fables of our experience of Post-Fordist life and labour, we will elaborate concepts from what Suely Rolnik calls the 'sensible mutations' found within our current regimes of value production. How do provoke frictions and counter-conducts, structures of support, and other forms of

value, for ourselves and with others? How might we intervene into the formats and processes that manage expectations, relationships, the production of knowledge and social care?

Part seminar, part analytic support group, micropolitics will meet on the second Monday of each month.

OUR FIRST MONDAY SESSION:

Monday, 13 of October 6:30 PM at Housman's Bookshop, 2nd floor

This first session will include an introduction to group processes led by Brazilian occupational therapist Elizabeth Maria Freire de Araújo Lima.

Beth teaches at the Medicine Faculty of Universidade de São Paulo (FMUSP); is coordinator of the Study and Research Laboratory "Art and Body in Occupational Therapy" at the Physiotherapy, Speech Therapy and Occupational Therapy Department, FMUSP, São Paulo.

Beth has asked us to read the following short text: Gilles Deleuze. 'Three Group Related Problems' from Desert Islands and Other Texts, Semiotexte, 2004, pp.193-203

Beth has written on the resonances between art and clinical practice... At this meeting, we will also plot the schedule for the Mondays of the next few months. The group is open to anyone. Please RSVP to: micropolitics-group@---

Micropolitics Events

JUNE, 2008

Friends from the Ljubljana-based Radical Education Group will be in London for three days at the end of June to meet with local housing organisers, artists and educators. With them the Micropolitics Group will drift to two sites, in search of transversal alliances between sites of art, education and struggle.

Both events are free of charge and all are welcome!

I. Transversal Occupations

Report from the ROG Social Centre in Ljubljana and discussion

Bowl Court Social Centre [evicted in February of 2009]

II. Arts Education in the Name of What?

Report from the Radical Education project in Ljubljana and discussion of London possibilities
Camden Arts Centre

Gasper Kralj, a member of the Rog collective will present on the current state of affairs in an occupied factory in Ljubljana currently under threat by local government. Rog is a completely furnished, programmatically innovative and well visited concert hall, circus and gallery. The social centre holds regular meetings and weekly discussions with workers living in boarding houses, activists from the asylum seekers home, people without papers, detained in the detention centre in Postojna, the erased citizens of Slovenia and others who recognise the creative, organisational and resistance potential of Rog. The temporary users of Rog represent an inexhaustible wealth of knowledge and experience. In many ways they have become an example to other autonomous spaces of independent

art and cultural, intellectual and social activities both in Slovenia and in Europe.

The Rog factory proves that it is possible to organize life and labour without concessions to privilege and profit demanded by the capitalist city management and the advancing eradication of public spaces, including institutions of art, culture, education and social activities. As an active site of occupation, Rog's users denounce all forms of eradication of such places and stand committed to defending them.

The event follows a meeting of European Social Centers at ROG, 20-21-22 June

More information at: <http://tovarna.org>

II. Art Education in the Name of What?

Gasper Kralj, Bojana Piskur and Adela Zeleznik, members of the Radical Education project initiated by the Moderna galerija will present on the convergence of groups using processes of militant research and popular education to organise transversally in Ljubljana. Radical Education, an ongoing series of inquiries and events, has worked in the context of social centres, gallery spaces, the street and sites of formal education, bringing together and supporting the work of artists, housing and migration activists. In this moment: in which pedagogical and affective processes become sites of seduction for the neo-liberalising forces of higher education, the programmatic engines of the corporate museum and accelerating waves of gentrification, how might arts education activities in London be re-oriented, reverse engineered to support specific sites of struggle?

Micropolitics April and May 2008

After a week and several events Brian Holmes in March (see Drift below), a presentation as part of Gasworks Disclosures series and extended discussions and planning sessions the micropolitics research group constituted itself as a much broader base and aimed to diversify its work beyond inviting speakers and running one-off events. We decided that we should build a series of sites and experiences together over the coming months, in order that we have some more 'material' through which to imagine future modes of organising. We talked about the group holding a space where multiple reflections can take place, where different modes of action might occur and how we might work with other people, groups and sites from a micropolitical perspective. In this, we talked again about Free Labour as a line of situated inquiry, photoromances and soap operas. We decided to aim to meet roughly twice a month, once at a fixed location, and one drift to another site/ event each month. The following took place at the end of March, April and May:

Saturday MARCH 29th

Presentation and Discussion as part of Gasworks 'Disclosures' at Toynbee Hall

We spoke about the micropolitics research group and issues around cultural work and free labour. We spoke about the history and format of the Potoromance and how we were trying to use this as a staging of

aspiration and a tool for reflection and activation. See separate page on Photoromance above.

Gasworks: Disclosures. Institution of Rot (Richard and Lucia)

[location] there's no number just look for the black door, rap 3 times on the door with the piano pedals
Reading: Colectivo Situaciones text distributed via list.
At this event Richard Crow and Lucia Faranati spoke of the history of the Institute of Rot on the eve of their eviction/ relocation from the space. We discussed differences between independently run spaces in the early 1990s, and now in London, and what the current possibilities of another recession might produce. Richard spoke of de Certeau and Artaud and the necessity of secrets in an era of supposed transparency.

February 26 and March 8/9, 2008

The City of Willingness, 24 hour walk through London with 16Beaver

As part of our ongoing enquiry, the Micropolitics Research Group at Goldsmiths [College of Art] has invited cultural theorist Brian Holmes to accompany us on a mobile extra-disciplinary investigation of conditions of precarity, flexibility and cultural production in London. The event is divided into three parts:

PART I: Preparing for the Drift

PART II: DRIFT: A London Cultural Workers' Inquiry

PART III: AFTER DRIFT: What will we do with our research?

PART I: Preparing for the Drift

At this seminar we will discuss some key texts and discuss our route through cultural worksites. We'll read the following:

1. Liar's Poker, a key text by Brian written a couple of years ago that flags up some of the problems artists run into when they attempt to engage in radical projects within the 'art frame'.

2. Marta Malo de Molina's text, Common Notions, Part 2: Institutional Analysis, Participatory Action-Research, Militant Research from the recent Transform issue on Institutent Practices gives us another set of genealogies through which to consider how we might think about our drift through London as something beyond the production of an 'art project.'

3. Marx's 1880 A Workers' Inquiry
an early form of militant research which might help us to focus our attention on the analysis of cultural work we hope to undertake on the drift.

PART II

THE DRIFT: A London Cultural Workers' Inquiry
Over the course of day, we will engage in what Brian Holmes calls an 'extradisciplinary investigation', walking to sites of culture and knowledge production in London, exploring the ways in which people experience flexibility, precarity and possible futures in relation to the paradigms of cultural production. At each stop, invited guests will be asked to share thoughts and anecdotes outlining the contradictions,

affects and critical tactics produced within their own experiences of their workplaces.

Our point of departure is Brian's assertion that:

'...cultural producers today, are humiliated by the conditions under which we work'

Our end point: A pub (location tba)

Practically speaking, we will begin at: 10:30 a.m., Goldsmiths College... The route includes a stop at the 56a social centre, Gasworks Gallery, The Ideas Store, various spaces in Shoreditch, and if there is time we'll head to the edge of the Olympic site.

We'd prefer for folks to attend the entire day. If this is not possible for you and you would like to join us along the way, call: [numbers]

PART III

AFTER-DRIFT: Seminar with Brian Holmes

Brian will open the discussion by talking about the ambiguity experienced by contemporary cultural producers in relationship to the flexible economy and the stories told on the drift. Referring to Brian's text on Extradisciplinary Investigations and Saturday's events, we will begin to generate an analysis and imagine next steps for the investigation. All are welcome!

Micropolitics hosts Suely Rolnik, December 2007

The Micropolitics Group (PoCA) will be hosting Suely Rolnik, cultural critic, curator, psychoanalyst and professor at the Universidade Católica de São Paulo, this December and organizing a number of events and meetings around her visit:

Monday, 26 November, 6-8 PM: Topic: Pimping and Counter-Pimping

In preparation for Suely Rolnik's visit to Goldsmiths, a session addressing the politics of subjectivation in cultural work. Reading:

Suely Rolnik, 'The Geopolitics of Pimping':

<http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/1106/rolnik/en>
Felix Guattari and Suely Rolnik Molecular Revolution in Brazil (forthcoming MIT Semiotexte):

'Subjectivity and History' pp.35-178 and 'Love, territories of desire and a new smoothness', pp.413-463

Suely Rolnik, Public Lecture: "Lygia Calling:

[Afterwards] Seminar will be based on texts for Reading Group (above), her lecture and thoughts on the forthcoming publication in English of 'Molecular Revolution in Brazil', MIT Semiotexte 2007/8

Suely Rolnik ... conducts a transdisciplinary doctoral program on contemporary subjectivity. She is co-author with Félix Guattari of Molecular Revolution in Brazil, and Micropolitics: Cartographies of Desire (1986). Most recently Rolnik curated "Lygia Clark.

From work to event. We are the mould, it's up to you to breathe substance into it', a touring exhibition and catalogue on Clark's later work. Refusing to simply re-display art works, the exhibition was composed of 63 video interviews with Clark's friends, acquaintances, students and colleagues about the implications of her experimental, collective projects like the 'Nostalgia of the Body' workshops of the early 1970s and the individual therapeutic

'Structuration of the Self' sessions she undertook on her return to Rio in 1976.

Stop Working!! Autonomist Video Night
During Franco Berardi's visit to the Micropolitics Group in February, he narrated the worker's strikes in 1977 Italy as a 'refusal of unhappiness'. The question was asked: what are our options today? Join us for an open enquiry into the possibilities for refusal of work (and unhappiness) as we search for inspirations and celebrate the end of term. It's an open mic, so bring a clip from your favourite work refusal video.

So far, the menu includes fragments from:

La Classe Operaia Va In Paradiso (Working Class Goes to Paradise); Director: Elio Petri; 1971

Surplus: Terrorized into Being Consumers; Director: Eric Gandini; 2003

Lavorare Con Lentezza; Director: Guido Chiesa; 2004
Paz!; Director: Renato De Maria;

I soliti ignoti; Mario Monicelli; 1958

Accattone; Pier Paolo Passolini; 1961

Franco Berardi (Bifo) lecturing in Bologna Lecture, February 9th, 2007

I decided to leave Italy for a month because this month and next month, is the 30th anniversary of 1977. So I receive calls from journalists asking what I think,

celebration and so on, so I escape from it, and I come here and I come here to talk about I don't remember what - and I speak about 77. But it's not the same situation. Why? It's easy to understand why. Because when a journalist asks me about 30 years ago and the 1970s in Italy, the central question of the interview is always violence. What do you think about violence... So please don't ask me about violence or otherwise I become violent. Lets think about the Ramones... or something else. I want to talk about about the 70s but not in general, I want to talk about the complexity and ambiguity - the double face of the 77 event in Bologna. I would like to take some special notice of the Bologna specificity. What is the meaning of that year? It's not just an Italian event. It's the year when Charlie Chaplin died...

Recording of lecture:

<http://www.forgetphotography.com/V002.WAV>

"Paris Squat," from Fly's sketchbook, 1995



What is cultural self-organization?

Peter Conlin

In this text I'd like to briefly work through some facets of self-organization. This concept is to be understood here as if it has been, so to speak, shaken out of the question of what happens when cultural entities move from informal to formal, and thus evoking processes of professionalization, marketization, institutionalization, and many other '-izations.' What happens when this movement is deliberately resisted, when this transition is blocked or made all too easily, and what are examples of complex relations between the two leading to political agency? For better and worse I choose to work through the encounter of the formal and the informal in the concept of self-organization. The term is difficult, among other reasons, because it refers to a kind of activist tactic cum ethos, a management technique and a kind of subculture, and most of all because it is ideologically malleable.

In art there is, of course, a lot of discussion about artworks, artists, styles, signification, and some discussion of institutions and economics, but it seems there is very little discussion about



organization. It's conveniently disappeared into sociology and management studies. And, further, to what extent is art discussed in relation to self-organization? Collaboration and artist-led are generally the favoured terms, but to leave it at that is to foreclose a potentially rich area of practice.

Organization has a sociological cast which doesn't easily wash away. It's a little more centre-left than business and management, and close to policy and administration. So there's a suspicious imprint here. It's not really cultural enough to be let loose on culture. Is there another way to refer to what gets slotted into the organizational? Basic definitions of organization are centred around systematic arrangements, to pattern, structure or systematize actions. Advocates of organization like to consider it a verb instead of a noun, in order to renovate it away from the associations of being the very force of territorialization. The price of co-

ordination and general social intelligibility seems to be ossification. Adorno spoke of a necessary "obduracy and reification" that comes from bids for "external effectivity" in an antagonistic society. In a surprisingly Darwinist scenario, cultural work must take on a hardened structure in the name of self-preservation, "organization qua organization," which might allow it a relatively safe place in the Modern world, yet in so doing alienate it from its original purpose.

Self-organization seems to promise a kind of organization before it becomes organizational as such, that is, before it falls under the sway of abstract distinctions and rational models of efficiency that imbricate it into established power. Self-organisation works through the ideal of an immanent coordination closer to cultural (especially subcultural) experience and a spirit of non-compliance and collective empowerment. Yet at the same time self-organization is close to post-bureaucratic administration that seeks to empower enterprise through the autonomous organization of productivity and mutual self-interest. In this light self-organization might not be that distinct from the self-reliance and forced individualization of neoliberal governance. And from all of these promises there is the question of how much of self-organization is actual—are there more traditional organization forms operating behind self-organization, leaving it as rhetoric or ideology?

To speak of self-organization in culture is to evoke the relation between culture and administration, especially the tensions and interdependencies, as Adorno expressed in the paradox: "culture suffers damage when it is planned and administrated; when it is left to itself, however, everything cultural threatens not only to lose its possibility of effect, but its very existence as well." Self-organization pledges a possible way out of this paradox, integrating the

terms by delivering effectivity to culture without alienation and enhancing the vital functions and sociality of the processes hitherto known as administration.

The promise of self-organization might be remarkable, but, in a climate of intensive institutionalization and executive power, where it is seen as counter-productive in terms of success and survival, self-organization then becomes most of all a glimmering spectacle. Even though the numbers of artist-run spaces have increased in certain cities, maybe they aren't really self-organised. There is a sense that the relevance and glory years of artist-run initiatives are over, and self-organization (tied into alternative culture) is an embarrassing relic of the early 70s. Self-organization is the quaint vestige of a former cutting-edge emergent culture. We are now in a new period that is unabashedly top down, because after all, there is nothing wrong with good leadership and competency; and at the same time, cultural scenes (ecologies, in fact) are more complex, horizontal, networked, etc. and so top and bottom, museum, private gallery, artist-run project and even squatted social centre cannot be easily isolated. The whole notion of autonomous, self-organized art is viewed as fatally tied to the Modern fantasies of a free outside and leftist delusions of clear cut alternatives. However there is a certain hubris in such a perception, a more 'complex than thou' presentist claim to superiority which is unsupported.

But the more something is seen as impossible or even delusional, the more alluring it can appear. This is evidenced in a painting, in a rather typical

contemporary style that mixes abstraction with literal references, decorative and filmic. In this way the painting represents a reasonable degree of market professionalism on the part of the painter, but what else? "Spontaneous Self-organisation" (2008), by Ry Fyan, is held in the Saatchi collection. Saatchi's exclusivity, executive authority and full imbrication into the institutionalized art world has to be considered as the antithesis of self-organization. The painting renders the institutional dream, still so central to art, of self-organized culture beyond anything and everything institutional without dissolving into nature or chaos. An enduring rule of art: neither entropy nor dreary bureaucracy, it is only in the realm of the self-organizational that culture can truly flourish. A crystal form materializes in the sky. The pattern replicates with fascinating deviations, above a Mediterranean city which seems to have spoken or emitted it; with 20th century vestiges in the foreground, and behind it all, the glowing horizon at dawn. But is this to say that self-organization is just playing 'other to your same' - can it be more than a bout of recreation that enables a mundane, business-like reality to manage contradictions and banish radical challenges into harmless myths? How recoverable is self-organization from a commodified counter-culture of decorative non-conformity and never realized freedom?

Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Routledge, 1991

This is a fragment of a larger text.



an assembly at a Social Center in Terrasa, Spain (photo: Miguel Martinez)

2009 – 400th Anniversary of Appearance of Dutch Squatters in Manahatta

16 Beaver Group: Friday Night 1.9.08 -- 400th Year of NYC Colonialism -- Beaver, Wampum, Hoes -- David Graeber, Sal Randolph, Renée Ridgway // 16beavergroup.org

“Wampum” and “Debt, Violence, and Impersonal Markets,” by David Graeber

This... event takes up the 400th anniversary of Dutch colonialism in what we now know as New York City. This event also arrives, with more specificity, as the long-awaited answer to the origins of the Beaver in Beaver Street. So, we welcome Renée Ridgway and Sal Randolph, two artists/other professional things who have been a part of past discussions and events at Beaver, as well as welcome back David Graeber, to discuss research, concepts, and projects addressing the historical transformation of gift economies into commodity economies, including debt, that made capitalism possible. Finally, it should be made clear that all of this work seeks to address contemporary New York and beyond by thinking through the current financial crisis, debt economies, and alternative systems of value.



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Renée and Sal's work actually engages with David's research and writing... Renée's ongoing project "Beaver, Wampum, Hoes" and Sal's project freely distributing David's 'Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value' might speak to a series of practices in common, taken up in different forms.

...

--What is the contemporary usage of a local or regional economic investigation vis-a-vis global financial systems? Can historical commemoration, such as upcoming Dutch colonial events in New York, be subverted toward a more radical popular relationship to economic histories and forms?

the full version of David's texts can be downloaded from our website:

<http://www.16beavergroup.org/monday>

2. About Beaver, Wampum, Hoes -- a project by Renée Ridgway

In 2009 New York will celebrate 400 years of Dutch colonial settlement with museums presenting exhibitions on subjects relevant to the legendary voyage, programs exploring business and tourist opportunities, even a transatlantic race. Both Amsterdam and New York desire to intensify and renew historic, cultural, and commercial ties. Specifically the terms of diversity and tolerance top the agenda in the hope of creating productive new capitalistic business and cultural relationships at a time when the long-term viability of such a system of endless expansion is being called into question like rarely before.

What are the long-term effects of 16th century globalisation in 21st century New York? Commemoration and celebration in the form of spectacle will cultivate historical awareness without taking an in-depth look at how societies, families and the environment have been ravaged by 400 years of immigration. In which ways does the prosperity of 'civilisation' result in an eradication of indigenous peoples, flora and fauna yet now appears to result in a regeneration and reinscription of cultural legacies?



On April 4, 1609 Henry Hudson set sail from Amsterdam on a Dutch ship under the auspices of the Dutch East India company in order to find a passage to Asia. Instead he founded a settlement (West Indian Company) for the Dutch on the tip of Manhattan (Museum of American Indian, near Beaver Street), a trading post exporting beaver pelts back to the old world because it was fashionable to make hats out of them. The company exchanged European goods (hoes, kettles, etc.) for wampum with the indigenous population living on Long Island, the Narragansett. They then traded the acquired wampum for beaver pelts with the Mohawk, part of the larger Haudonasaunee (Iroquois Confederacy) or Six Nations.

Today many Native American societies have set up systems of exchange with which to generate income from public money, voluntarily contributed by millions of visitors each year at their casino and resorts. As Native American land is not under state law in this sovereign system where no tax is paid on earnings, this money (profit) is redistributed into the tribes and supports the peoples, their activities and those families living on tribal land (reservations). Controversial issues such as 'no land into trust' bring to bear the terms of repatriation and sovereignty. The terms with which land was 'purchased' was sealed with belts of wampum. What is this wampum and how is it still used today? Who negotiates it uses? May wampum be seen as a living 'cultural currency' within a value system not acknowledged by present day capitalism in the United States of America? Within the 'clan' systems and structures of the Native American nations how is value determined and what laws are still contained?

Beaver, Wampum and Hoes

Beaver, Wampum*, Hoes is an upcoming online, multimedia series of presentations that focuses on 400 years of Dutch colonization in NY. It uses the 17th c. trade triangle (Beaver, Wampum, Hoes) as the thread that weaves anecdotes with facts in an attempt to ask broader questions about the affects of colonization and the largest imminent questions (land) concerning taking account of this history. In the 21st century beavers are back in town, Native American casinos provide an alternative yet controversial signature of financial support, hoes a homonym comprised of European goods as well as human commodity. Beaver, Wampum, Hoes measures accountability through a heterogeneous, collective exchange platform.

Beaver, Wampum, Hoes is the latest installment of Ridgway's nine-year 'Manhattan Project'. Frequently involving audience participation along with the physical and intellectual recycling and reinscription of historic as well as contemporary positions, this project investigates the commonalities between the Netherlands and the U.S. Presented in public spaces and using an extension of this methodology on different materials/subjects, such as deerskin, flags, tulip bulbs, money/investment, speech, beaver, wampum, hoes, silver and gold, all are 'killed' and reconstituted as raw material that is particular to the colonization of North America. The 'Manhattan Project' may be seen as a kind of contemporary barometric reading of the cultural, economic and political relations between these two countries.

{excerpted from text posted at: <http://www.16beavergroup.org/monday/archives/002771.php#more>}



2 Holland Society of New York badges, 1909; 300th anniversary of Henry Hudson's exploration of the river named for him

Barcelona is the site of some of the most exciting squatted social center action in Spain.



Krax City Mine(d) is there, and one of their texts is included here. Two of the videos shown at ABC No Rio concerned work in this city – Dara Greenwald’s “Tactical Tourist” and Octavi Royo, “Okupa, Crónica de una Lucha Social.” We had a great discussion after these films with Emily Piper Foreman and Marina Monsonis. These conversations will be transcribed and included in “House Magic,” volume 2, due out in September 2009 at the conclusion of the Queens version of the show.

bridge text for Barcelona

CALL FOR A EUROPEAN CONFERENCE OF SOCIAL CENTERS BARCELONA/TERRASSA, 2009, January 8-10: Network is Coming

[excerpted from full program]

Social centers – in their different forms and declinations – have been in the last twenty years one of the most significant common words in autonomous movements all over Europe. The fil rouge connecting several experiences from North to South, from East to West has been the constitution of self managed spaces – for culture, rights and socialization – as political counterpowers able to challenge the hegemony of the State, of the Parties, of the Market. Since the 1980s housing rights, underground cultures, anti-hierarchical politics have been the major focuses of these spaces and led them to crisscross the counter-memories haunting Europe and to experiment new fields of struggle for social and urban rights, for emancipation and political expression from below.

Networks on an European level have been rising through the last years, allowing the development of common lexicons, shared strategies, interchange and constructive critique as well as translocal coordination of initiatives for autonomous coordination of struggles on an international scale. The combination and composition of difference, the ability to translate experiences from one place to another and the mutual respect made possible both the constitution of permanent links and alliances between experiences and also the constitution of (virtual and non-virtual) spaces of coordination with variable geometries of participation.

Starting from this stratification of experiences, the emerging projects of social centres are experimenting deep mutations, new forms of acting in the urban space. Metropolis is today a laboratory for new typologies of social centres: as embryonic universities of cognitive workers in the emerging framework of the production of knowledge, as nascent prototypes of social unionism in the new framework of precarious labour, not only for self-defence but also for demanding new social and urban rights in the postcolonial and post-industrial city; finally as autonomous processes trying to configure new forms of cooperative organization able to make common the subjective surplus and able to resist expropriation and exploitation in the contemporary composition of living labour.

In this framework, several social centres met last June in Ljubljana – in Social Centre Rog – for a preliminary articulation of a networking among these new experiences. In Ljubljana meeting, beyond the connection and interchange, we feel the need to open spaces for collective discussion on some issues. This is why we decided to organize two open meeting on these topics.

The first meeting, organized by Exit-Bcn and Ateneu Candela in the beginning of January 2009, will discuss new forms of unionism in the European framework, and the strategies for resources and fundraising of autonomous projects. The second meeting – the proposal is to realize it in Rome in Spring 2009 – will discuss networks of self-formation and the emergence of free universities. Finally it will be the place to discuss and invent perspective for networking and net-forms of cooperation among autonomous spaces.

This is why we call for a meeting in Barcelona/Terrassa – on the 8th, 9th and 10th of January 2009. It will be divided in two parts: in the first days – in Barcelona – various panels will introduce a discussion on new forms of unionism with particular attention to citizenship, informal and precarious labour, cognitive production. The second part – in Terrassa on the 10th – will be for sharing experiences and discuss a first proposal about “alter” Erasmus; the European production of spaces for self-education; the role of social centers as metropolitan tools of conflict, in the European framework and in the scene of global crisis.

With [excerpted to group names]: SC Rog (Ljubljana), Oficinas de Derechos Sociales (Terrassa), Freefighters (Belgrade), Ferrocarril Clandestino (Madrid), Associazione de Difesa Lavoratori (Padova), Ods-Centro Vecinal Pumarejo, V de Vivienda (Barcelona), SIEU – Justice for Cleaners, ESC (Rome), Sale (Venezia), Traficantes de Sueños (Madrid), Exgae (Barcelona), Coordination des Intermittents et Précaires d’Île de France (Paris), La Casa Invisible (Malaga), Hackademy (Madrid), Universidade Invisible (Coruña), EIPCP.net, ESC (Rome), Universidad Nómada, S.A.L.E Docks (Venice), Ateneu Candela (Terrassa)

Two abstracts

Abstract: "The Squatters' Movement in Spain: A Local and Global Cycle of Urban Protests"

by Miguel Martínez López

Squatting in abandoned houses and buildings in Spanish cities has been a continuous occurrence since the early 1980s. CSOAs (Centros Sociales Okupados y Autogestionados/Squatted and Self-managed Social Centres, SC from now on) acquired greater public importance than buildings squatted only for residential purposes. Nevertheless, both forms of squatting have taken place simultaneously. This article delineates the main characteristics of this movement by taking into consideration: a) spatial trends, b) the ideological principles, c) attempts for coordination and d) the interrelationship with other social movements. This exercise develops a working definition of the squatters' movement in Spain that allows us to argue that its repertoire of protest and political objectives represent an innovation in the cycle of alter-globalization demonstrations which the squatters' movement has actively joined, although local transformation and mobilisations were also intensively promoted.

Key words: squatting, urban movements, counter-culture, alter-globalization, Spain

Abstract: "Urban Movements and Paradoxical Utopianisms," by Miguel Martínez López
for the 8th International Utopian Studies Society Conference in Plymouth, July 2007

The squatters' movement in Spain has been developing more than 20 years. Beyond the figures of involved buildings and activists, evictions, demonstrations and so on, a rich experience in terms of political struggle at the municipal level was accumulated. How can this "success" be explained? Part is due to structural conditions according to laws, repression, bonds between social movements, etc. Another part depends on the capacities of the movement for recreating, in practice, a counterculture that stems from the libertarian and utopian ideals from the 1960s and even from previous anarchist ideological frames. What is interesting to note is that, simultaneously, this is a post-leftist movement (and, for some, a post-modern and just life-style one) with no clear appeal to immediate revolution, to political parties, labour unions or to the power of State. Therefore, I argue that Spanish squatters were fed by utopian and neo-anarchist ideas and they could put them in practice in everyday life and communal terms. On the other hand, they broke with the very idea of utopia in terms of its application to the whole society, political system or even the city and municipalities. Work instability, spatial nomadism and fast replacement of activists are some of the evidences that support the latter statement. The former is mainly proven by the experience of collective self-management of squatted buildings, and the opposition to institutional ways of political action. Documents, participant observation and interviews are the sources of the information used. Finally, the social and political creativity of this minority urban movement, its persistence along the years and the flow of messages disseminated within society and the alter-globalisation movement, require a careful attention to the utopian frames of meaning that feed back the movement once and again.

Key words: Squatters, Neo-anarchism, Paradoxes

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photo by Miguel Martinez

A Roof Over One's Head in This World

James Graham

There is space all around us but there is never enough room. It is quite amazing. Man can make a crime out of almost anything. Spain is in crisis. Well, the world is in crisis. Each country in the modern treadmill to peace and prosperity has had their own particular nervous breakdown.

The particulars of Spain's situation include a largely agricultural economy; a millennial culture which predates and incorporates Christianity and everything after, which is pre- or anti-capitalist in its essential communal framework; a socialist government, paralyzed by the world financial meltdown, desperately trying to figure out how to revive an economy driven by two restless demons: construction and tourism, both given to excess and illegality.

For much of the last twenty years of its membership in the EU, Spain could boast of two first place rankings: it has more bars and new buildings than anywhere else in Europe. Leaving aside the first distinction, Spain, blessed with large amounts of open space – a rarity in the Old World – was, before the Crisis, building feverishly, on the coasts especially but in the remote villages, too, and all around the cities, where the suburbs have pushed out into the plains and Spaniards have adopted the awful ritual known as the daily commute.

Meanwhile a brief stroll around any city, especially any southern city, will reveal the awesome numbers of abandoned buildings, in and around the center, extending out to the periphery. City Hall in the town where I live is bound on one side by an avenue of fashionable stores and on the other by a warren of narrow, medieval streets where every fourth or fifth building is either for sale, abandoned or wrapped in a kind of muslin that announces a possible reforma, now delayed if not outright canceled and forgotten.

This is just as true in many of the smaller towns of prosperous Catalunya as it is in poorer Andalucia.

The street leading to the Alhambra in Granada – one of the country's principal tourist attractions – is a winding, three-block affair that goes up the red-dirt hill known as Sabika. The last time I climbed the hill, I stopped counting at a dozen abandoned houses. In one of the buildings undergoing a thorough gutting and rehabilitation, a worker lost his life in February due to shoddy, hurried construction practices. Work was suspended for a few days, a slap on the wrist was employed to the company in charge. From the terrace of my old apartment it was easy to see

into the back of the building, whose walls both inside and out were covered with graffiti.

The building was an okupa, an occupation by urban squatters.

A popular graffito asserts that there are three million abandoned buildings throughout Spain. Where there is space, there must somehow be an applied scarcity. A magical scarcity that will cause people to rush off in one direction and not the other.

There is always space for people to live but never enough houses. Do we frame space so as to keep some people out? Of course we do. In the United States we like to build sprawling suburbs and prisons because we are afraid of space, the



terrifying sense of inadequacy we feel when confronted by something we have no sense of how to use. But that is another country.

The Spaniard is a town dweller, a man or woman intimately identified with the place where they came from. But with modern practices come

modern vices, and here in Granada, the Vega, the lovely rolling hills and rich farmland surrounding the city, is seen as so much surplus, a place to expand in, to build parks and factories and new villages. Immense amounts of space exist inside the city proper but it is ignored, forgotten. (The old train yards in the city, the abandoned huertas, the new “park” on the outskirts.) It does not matter how many people protest, progress rolls on. The Germans send their money to the EU, and it goes straight into the hands of the bureaucrats, who justify their time with grand projects and petty larceny. The popular explanation is that after many years of extreme poverty, Spaniards wished to join Europe, and that meant new homes in new apartment buildings, essential modern conveniences like air conditioning and winter heating, and a general goodbye to all that attitude. Easy money from the banks financed the construction boom, whose essential ingredient is that tightly knit band of thieves which includes the landowner, the banker, the constructor, and lest we forget, the mayor and his gang in city hall, along with their regional higher-ups. In Spain this web of connections is called *enchufismo*.

Meanwhile the development on Spain’s sunny coasts has been such a whirlwind of corruption and ecological devastation that even the stolid European Parliament recently (April 09) told Spain to knock it off or face sanctions. Gated communities, massive golf courses, foreign occupations (largely German and English, the international jet set and the Saudis claiming Marbella), hotels built in national parks have been the order of the day for the last forty years. Spain is currently on the list of Dead Man Walking economies, a list that in Europe also includes Ireland and Greece. Its economy is sustained by the contributions of the richer, industrialized nations to the north. Between four and five million people are out of work, a terrifying figure that gives the bureaucrats in Madrid night sweats. Spain desperately needs a new model for its economy, and it is to their credit that in Spain itself, indeed in Europe as a whole, people are talking about exactly what this different economy might look like.

Meanwhile, all over the country, the people living in the *okupas*, whether young or old, transients or long-time residents, anarchists or homeless, face the threat and often the reality of eviction at the behest of local officials in cahoots with developers who hope to claim a juicy piece of real estate at bargain prices. Simply kick out

the squatters and wait for the local government to provide its free-of-cost rehabilitation. Then you either move in or you rent the place to the lucky foreigners who prospered in the New Economy.

I live in Granada, in Andalucia. Let me tell you about two places I know.

The Casa del Aire is a large building sitting between the Cuesta de Beteta and Callejon Zenete in Granada’s Albayzin; at one time people were able to pass through the building as a shortcut on their way up the zigzagging streets of the Albayzin to the steep hills of Sacromonte and beyond. Del Aire was the common name for such houses.

Casa del Aire has been squatted continuously since 1980. The residents of the house have been fighting eviction since 2004.

The Albayzin, or “poor people’s barrio” in Arabic, was designated a Patrimony of Humanity by UNESCO in 1994. This much-sought-after title meant that large sums of money began to pour into the local government for “rehabilitation,” with no discernible oversight. UNESCO regularly complains about smooth stones (instead of rough cobbles) being used for walkways and Granada currently wages a loud campaign against graffiti, but both have turned a blind eye towards the rampant development and destruction of the character of the neighborhood. It is worth taking a moment to think about the social topography of Granada. The whole world has heard of the Alhambra, the fantastic “Moslem gazebo” (Gerald Brennan’s words), which functioned as the administrative and residential headquarters of Nazari rule in the kingdom of Granada. (The two other principal centers were Sevilla and Cordoba.) Immediately below the Alhambra sits the Realejo, at one time a largely Jewish district, with its numerous examples of Gothic architecture. Across the Darro River sits an equally imposing hill where the workers and poor people lived: the Albaycin. These three living monuments define the glory of Granada, the reasons that anyone comes here. The Albaycin has always been a place apart: it adamantly maintained its character long after the Reconquest. What distinguished the place was its people and its homes, the famous *carmens*, small palaces built around walled gardens. (Carmen, from *karm* in Arabic.) The streets are tricky, winding affairs, unnamed for most of their existence. The people who live here still call themselves *Albaycineros*. They consider the trek

down the hill to Granada “a trip into town.” The latest landrush in the Albaycin began in 1994, with UNESCO designation. The Albaycin, along with the Alhambra the purest example of Arab civilization in Europe, is under attack. It will become a theme park soon, full of Northern Europeans and the wealthy friends of the local administration. Elderly people and families are being evicted, buildings changed to reflect the uniformity of tasteful modern living, roads widened, parking garages installed. Contracts for prize lots are handed out illegally, while other buildings are left to ruin to encourage people to leave. The locals protest and form associations, and the squatters in the Casa del Aire hang on. Granada is a small town, far away from the spotlight.

Probably the best thing that could be done would be to make a stink, lodge a direct, formal protest with UNESCO, but this seems unlikely. Meanwhile, to give everything the authentic touch, the old walls surrounding the ancient city are being restored. The only things lacking are high beam lights and surveillance cameras staring down at people, plus an ever-so-convenient shopping center or two.



Unlike some of the okupas in the larger cities, the Casa del Aire does not function as a social center. Its various tenants, some resident since

1980, hold on and fight legal battles to keep the city at bay. The building has changed hands twice since the brothers who owned it sold out in 2004. Until that time, there were verbal contracts between the residents and the owners, and the residents made their own repairs. 2004 was the beginning of the Golden Boom, and the residents of the Casa del Aire have been fighting for the space ever since.

As they say on the website (Casadelaire.org), “The problem presented by the Casa del Aire is merely the tip of the iceberg in a urban conflict whose character is structural and social, involving real estate speculation that benefits businesses, banks, politicians.... Meanwhile the social fabric of neighborhoods disappears and the historic centers are inundated by luxury apartments, which stretch to the outer limits of the old neighborhoods.”

Granada is a strange town. It is not so much provincial, that favorite word of the Madrileños, as it is smug. It is wealthy two times over, and being a laid back place that has been graced by the presence of poets and painters and musicians, tends not to put up a fight about anything. But the fabled city around them, the one Granadinos so profit from, disappears a little bit more each year.

La Casa Invisible is located in the historic center of Málaga, el casco antiguo, on a block that seems nearly abandoned at first glance but isn't. It is a large solar, with a four storied front building, a large garden and a building in back. Malaga is a very different city than Granada and there is a lot going on in La Casa Invisible. The Free University has offices there, an activist group that goes by the name Office of Social Rights, and a number of other formations, as well as theatres and lectures by architects, software developers, museum directors. When I visited Malaga in April, the lights were out – on the entire block. The building has generators, and had put on a concert the night before. It is large hulking edifice – plenty of room for conferences, kitchens, cafes, classrooms. And they are all there. La Casa Invisible seems to be the model or the prototype for the struggling urban occupation/social center, reminiscent of many of the abandoned schools occupied on New York's Lower East Side. With one crucial difference.

They are organized, and have a list of prominent supporters. As they note in their literature, “The organizers of Casa Invisible began to negotiate with the city government, the legal owners, from

the time the building was occupied, undertaking a process of investigation and experimentation unique in Spain. With the result that legal authorities, people who play a role in the life of the city, creators, cultural directors and urbanists in conjunction with the building's governing body work together to insure that the building maintains its autonomy within the context of the legal system."

In short, they are on the road to getting legal status. The government in the south is so large – nearly 20% of the citizenry work for a branch of the local Ayuntamiento or Junta de Andalucía – that you can be in court battling one arm of the law while having another arm print up your deluxe brochures and accepting an offer to speak at your next urban conference.

And yet the directors of Casa Invisible don't forget to throw a little wood onto the fire:

"La Casa Invisible is an experimental institution whose mere existence is a stark demonstration of the capacity of the citizens to manage their common interests and necessities. It is a common space not managed by the state. We don't need the market to produce value, and we don't need the State to manage everyday life. We don't need permission to be free."

This account may be leaving out the most telling part of my experience in Malaga.

The city's historic center has undergone the same blitzkrieg as other Spanish cities, perhaps the worst of its kind. The razing of old buildings is reminiscent of the clearing of what is now Rockefeller Center and Lincoln Center in New York, except that the old buildings weren't tenements, had large spacious apartments and were eminently renewable.

One of the center's directors handed me a volume entitled *Malaga Solar de Paraiso* published in the 90s. While the Moor's castle in the center was being painstakingly rehabilitated, and the house where Picasso was born was being turned into a museum, the bulldozers were at work, tearing down blocks and blocks of old buildings. The center of Malaga is a mishmash now, a collection of faceless, tasteful modern apartment and office buildings, with the occasional blocks of old apartment houses quietly going to seed. The "tear it all down" fury seemed to have abated, until I looked from the wooden plank where I was standing and realized another block had been quietly imploded to make way for a Thyssen Borneheiser Museum of 19th century landscapes. Certainly it is needed that. We can never get enough of 19th century landscapes, or 19th century trollopes or 19th

century figurative sketches. Let there be somewhere in Europe an enormous museum that can hold the entire "realistic" 19th century in it. Let it have Darwin's head and Dostoevsky's mouth and Baudelaire's eyes and the entrails of everyone who died in the name of Progress in it, and let it be on wheels so that it may travel all over Europe constantly, an enormous box of one hundred and eighty wheels, to travel and terrify the children in every country it visits. And then there will be no need to destroy a lovely city to make way for faceless apartments and dull museums which no one will ever visit but which will sit there and quietly get fat off public monies.

It remains an odd, odd thing, this enormous mouth which runs the show and directs the action. This mouth, which I imagine looks somewhat like Dick Cheney's mouth, tells us that the city is no good, and that it has to be torn down, and those living in the old or abandoned buildings and making a life of it and maybe even changing the city around them, all of that has to go. Because there is not enough room, ever, for what they want to do, without tearing down people's past and their customs. But then, once most of it is torn down, it is very valuable once again, and now it is the Historic Center, and it is part of the Patrimony of this or that Humanity, and it must be preserved. And the mouth tells us that it must be preserved by putting up a Museum of 19th century landscapes.

It is the essence of the Theme Park approach, one that I imagine started with Times Square in New York, and has since spread around the world. Spaces must be destroyed in order to be preserved: that's their motto.

Like it or not, Old Europe, to steal a phrase, is the engine of ideas – not museums. Oh, the museums are there, and there are great and necessary ones. But now Europe is becoming the site of the mini-museum and the Official Cultural Center, and it is not the same. The world depends on Europe to develop new ideas, ideas that come out of its cultures for which no museum is necessary.

The okupas have taken up residence in the old, abandoned houses and are trying to create something new. Europe has become a bit stolid, waiting for the Americans to come up with something new, and the okupas are living poor and thinking out loud. If the Neoliberal game really had its full nine innings, then what comes next? Everyone is very busy being either in or out of work. The okupas are sitting in the town

centers, trying to think of a new way.

I was in Malaga for a day. It is a very different place than Granada, refreshingly so. But the devastation in the casco was evident. We had a good lunch, Carlos and Ana and I, a peasant's lunch of white fish with good white wine and then we strolled. We walked past the fence and the plywood walls around the new museum and Carlos, one of Casa Invisible's directors, pointed out a building to me: an old building on the corner of the block where they live., and where they kindly put me up for the night. Substantial, not going to ruin, twenty or thirty apartments in it, enough for a hundred people, a small plaza out the window. I'd buy it, I thought, if I had any

money. Well, that was the wine talking. I never have any money.

Carlos had climbed in from the roof one day for some reason. He was looking around. And what he found in one of the apartments was an agenda from the early Seventies. The building, a worthwhile building, not ugly, not faceless, 18th or 19th century, solid, had been sitting empty for forty years in Malaga's downtown.

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James Graham has been homeless since 2003.

He is the archetype of the New Nomad. He doesn't live now where he did when he wrote this article. He is the author of *The Apartment Thief*, a novel.



all photos by James Graham taken in and around the Albaicyn, the ancient Moorish neighborhood in Granada which is slowly being chipped away...

“Opus Dei nos destruye la huerta” – “We wanted to develop and give life to a building that had been abandoned for 25 years. And Opus Dei came in and destroyed the garden.”

“Dios es Ateo” (“God is an atheist”)

“Monkey Christ” construction scene
One of the best graffiti in the Albaicyn, its location and the construction work going on directly underneath seem rather ominous. The picture is probably gone by now, sand blasted away so the nice English couple could have a bare white wall to live with. It looks like the work of El Niño de las Pinturas, the most popular spray-gun guy in Granada.

ITALY – Background

Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, editors, “Autonomia: Post-Political Politics”
2007 MIT Press; originally 1979 from Semiotext(e)

with a new introduction by Sylvère Lotringer,
“In the Shadow of the Red Brigades”
“Most of the writers who contributed to the issue
were locked up at the time in Italian jails.... I was
trying to draw the attention of the American Left,
which still believed in Eurocommunism, to the
fate of Autonomia. The survival of the last
politically creative movement in the West was at
stake, but no one in the United States seemed to
realize that, or be willing to listen. Put together
as events in Italy were unfolding, the Autonomia
issue—which has no equivalent in Italy, or
anywhere for that matter—arrived too late, but it
remains an energizing account of a movement
that disappeared without bearing a trace, but with
a big future still ahead of it.”
—Sylvère Lotringer {online at MIT Press
website}

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“A Strange Movement of Strange Students
“The mass movement that emerged in Rome and
Bologna, in particular, in February to April 1977
was categorized by the ICP intellectual and
moderate workerist, Asor Rosa, as the ‘Second
Society’: a nomadic amalgam of university and
secondary school students, unemployed and
counter-cultural youth, feminists, homosexuals,
artists, and unaffiliated ex-New Left activists
known as cani sciolti (stray dogs), plus
autonomia and the remnants of the New Left
parties. The countercultural and anti-political
components that had been prominent in the 1968
movements returned to the fore to challenge the
neo-Leninist and workerist premises of
organized Autonomia through the ironic
communicative action of the Metropolitan
Indians and the linguistic transversalism of
‘creative autonomia’.”
from “A Laughter That Will Bury You All:
Irony as Protest and Language as Struggle in the
Italian 1977 Movement,” by Patrick G.
Cunningham
{online at Interactivist.net}

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Andrea Membretti, “Centro Sociale Leoncavallo:
Building Citizenship as an Innovative Service”
University of Pavia, Italy,
andrea.membretti@unipv.it
European Urban and Regional Studies, Vol. 14,
No. 3, 252-263 (2007)

In this article we analyse the bottom-up response
to the lack of social and cultural services in a
post-industrial area of Milan (Italy) as a
revealing experience of social innovation.
Leoncavallo, a self-managed and Leftist social,
cultural and political centre established in 1975,
represents a peculiar approach to the
management of collective services in a
participative and informal way, based on the
principle of autogestione (self-management).
Through an interesting process of ‘flexible
institutionalization’, this collective agent has
been able to survive the post-1968 era, evolving
nowadays into an important political actor in the
national and international scenes. From an
organizational point of view, the analysis shows
how social innovation processes (Moulaert et al.,
1990) are strongly related to the social enterprise
logic and to the spatial dimension (at different
scales): both the management of sense-making
processes and the ‘enactment’ of physical spaces
(frames) by the activists and by the users of
Leoncavallo provide the opportunity to combine
the economic, political and social dimensions.
This leads in the direction of a ‘glocal’
development, focused on human needs and
potentialities as fields for the building of an
active citizenship.

Key Words: autogestione (self-management) •
citizenship • empowerment • enactment of
spaces • flexible institutionalization • social
innovative services

see also: Andrea Membretti, “Centro Sociale
Leoncavallo: The Social Construction of a Public
Space of Proximity” (2003)
[http://www.republicart.net/disc/realpublicspaces/
membretti01_en.htm](http://www.republicart.net/disc/realpublicspaces/membretti01_en.htm)

ATELIER ESC- Rome

Virginia Villari

Let's begin with a brief introduction of Atelier ESC (Eccedi, Sottrai, Crea – Exceed, Subtract, Create) in Rome. This is part of the Roman network of occupied social centers. It is located in a warehouse in the neighborhood of San Lorenzo, which is one of the city's most longstanding left wing strongholds.

ESC is occupied and run by a group of graduate and PhD students and differently qualified looking-for-a-job people. What distinguishes it from the other social centers is its link to the world of education and its commitment to represent an interface between university and the city.

In a society based on information, language, intended as the spectrum of the various cultural and social expressions of human beings, has become one of the main resources of the productive system of the metropolis.

Consequently, ESC believes that university, and more specifically "La Sapienza," the largest university in Rome, has a crucial function in the production of cultural and social values.

ESC bases its activities on the acknowledgement of the blurred boundaries between university and the city. Accordingly, the Atelier's activists work towards the opening of the university world to the city's realities, often socially problematic, through initiatives that promote a more effective participation of culture into socially relevant matters. The center organizes debates on various social issues, documentary and independent film screenings, demonstrations and social services like "Infoshock," a window that provides information on drugs in order to reduce the damage of addictions.

ESC's ultimate aim is to put together the university's and the city's different, but intertwined, languages and knowledge to create a freer, broader, more engaged and accessible culture, mindful of the social realities that surround it and willful to serve as a useful tool to understand it.

As the word "atelier" suggests, art is crucial to ESC's mission to establish a dialogue between culture and society, university and metropolis, so that culture would serve as a tool of social and political struggle. ESC is also a laboratory for artistic experimentation with a cultural programming that includes exhibitions of young emerging artists, music events, performances and independent audio-video production.

In the fall of 2006 I found ESC the perfect place for an exhibition I was conceiving, especially given the type of event they organized and the

space they had: a huge industrial architecture on the street level, partly renovated and partly left as they found it (one of the elements that mostly interested me) with ruined old bricks and beams visible, alternating graffiti and stencils made by artists that exhibited there before, which were now permanent site-specific pieces. So I presented the project to the people in charge for the event programming: a one month group show titled "Estetiche Suburbane" (Suburban Aesthetics). Perhaps it would be more precise to describe it as a grouping of solo shows for it featured four artists (Luca Baseggio, Orlando Miani, Jonathan Pannaccio' and Simone Ottavi), each one exhibiting for one week with each show having its opening reception. It wasn't exactly a theme show because what linked the four wasn't a theme; rather they shared a mood, an atmosphere and aesthetics-the metropolitan, suburban ones-which have variety and multiplicity as main characteristics. Additionally, each opening had a Dj Set playing electro and techno music. Openings then lasted until late night becoming parties, and the music was accompanied by video projections from different video artists each time. The guys at ESC loved the project: we were on the same page in terms of promoting young emerging artists, the type of art, again informed by an aesthetics rooted in streets of the city, and the idea of mixing the art exhibition with a night music event.

This was the deal: ESC gave us the space for free; they got the proceeds from the bar and from the entrance fee, which started when the opening receptions finished and electro parties began. We could set up the space the way we wanted, even painting the walls, obviously without touching the graffiti painted by other artists. Because of ESC's policies we couldn't use a sponsor. Indeed, as almost all social centers in Italy, they don't work with commercial brands or corporations, precisely because they stand as organizations that oppose the social and economic behavior of commercial agencies. Social centers get the funds through the events they organize (the bar and the entrance) and sometimes from the city's administration. So we agreed to share the costs of flyers, posters and

the installation equipment. According to the same policies we couldn't sell the works while they were still inside the atelier. The show's promotion was carried out by me, the curator, helped out by two members of ESC who sent out invitations and emails to the atelier's list of contacts. Additionally, we had to negotiate about the show's viewing hours. ESC was usually open to the public three afternoons a week; eventually we agreed upon four full days, in which either I or the artists would stay there together with at least one member of ESC.

The show was a success. It was very well advertised thanks to the team work between the press office (me) and ESC, which had usual advertisement spaces on two pretty well known newspapers. Once again, putting together music and art was a good idea also in terms of publicity since the magazines that advertised the dj set publicized the show as well and vice versa.

A lot of people came to each opening and the ones that came primarily for the music (all the

openings happened on Friday) had the chance to see an art exhibition that they wouldn't go to see otherwise. Further, it was interesting to see some of the art galleries folks mixing up with a more "alternative" crowd, with some of them staying until late and dancing to techno.

Curating an art show at Atelier ESC was a positive experience from several points of view. First of all it was a chance to gain visibility for both us, me and the artists, and the center.

Besides, it didn't feel like there was someone with more power than others, like it often happens when working in galleries or museums, but it was rather a collaboration in which whoever was involved put her or his own skills at the service of the greater project. Eventually we formed a team that worked well because based on a democratic negotiation on the different matters that came up during the show's organization. (www.escatelier.net).

links to other Roman social centers:

www.forteprenestino.net

www.vglobale.biz

www.exsnia.it

www.rialtosantambrogio.org

www.csoalastrada.org



nighttime in the garden of
Leon Cavallo center in
Milan (photo by Charlie
Ahearn)

February 16, 2009 – Milan: Social Center Cox18 re-occupied!
from the blog Anomalous Wave

Good news from Milan: the evicted social center Cox18 a.k.a. Conchetta has been re-occupied. After being violently evicted by cops, people have been campaigning to take their social center back. It seems they've had quite notable international guests in their events too: a week ago they organized a discussion with Amiri Baraka and Boots Riley (The Coup)!

This is from a message written by a Milanese activist:

it was a great emotional experience of exultation and defiance: we took it back, and they'll never take it from us again. fascist vice-mayor decorato has suffered its first defeat in more than a decade of power: he, the serial hater of gypsies, muslims, prostitutes, autonomists, graffiti writers was humbled by the crew of cox pirates that has rocked the once proletarian neighborhood of ticinese since the 80s. last night in conchetta, it was like being re-born, as every city activist, those born in the 60s, 70s, 80s, was there happy to be free again, and vowing to defeat securitarianism once for all in milano and europe.

See their blog: <http://cox18.noblogs.org/>



photo by Miguel Martinez

Rhino, Geneva, Switzerland

Partial transcription of a talk by Michel Chevalier, 4/21/09. Michel Chevalier came from Hamburg to visit and talk about his work there on 4/21/09. (See section on Germany for more.) At ABC No Rio, he showed a short video his group had produced on the Rhino squat in Geneva called *Rhino féroce*.

Michel simultaneously interpreted the video into English (it is in French with German subtitles). Some of his translation is transcribed below.

Rhino was shut down in Summer of 2007, so this place no longer exists.

In the 1980s, the right to be housed is subverted by the reigning culture of finance. The real estate bubble grows, then bursts. A housing crisis is aggravated by irresponsible financial actors, and many buildings are empty. Young people take over buildings. The squatting movement is born in reaction to all this real estate speculation. The political class initially tries to repress, then shifts gears and becomes more tolerant towards the squatters. Squats become integrated into liberal policy. By the early '90s there are 200 squats with 2,000 inhabitants.

The police organize a squat brigade. Their job is to maintain contact between the squatters and the owners. The left political parties instrumentalize the squats. The squats become locations for cultural events. The Rhino SC consists of activists and artists. They hold many street actions which call attention to the so-called "phantom buildings," that are unoccupied. In 1988 they occupied three buildings that had been empty for 10 years. [Details of city negotiations...]

Culture and housing are the basis of Rhino. There is a bar and a concert place with many avant garde concerts. Then a bistro opens, with lunch, concerts, parties, film projections. The squat becomes a popular symbol of alternative culture. Rhino is described as a "cultural lung" of the city. 500 diverse people live in Rhino. Communal life, self-management, community are models for other kinds of life which react against the crumbling of the outside society.

The rules are open. People choose their neighbors. There are places for artists and travelers to stay overnight. Decisions are made during weekly meetings on a democratic basis. Every inhabitant pays 67 Euros per month as a member of the association.

The political context changes. A conservative is elected mayor. His goal is to destroy the judicial basis of the squats. Raids ensue. A number of squats are adjudged uninhabitable. They are emptied, and continue empty today. [The film continues, explaining the details of the legal battle over Rhino, and the squats in Geneva,] a campaign of class-based justice that ends 20 years of dialogue.

A former resident of Rhino was in the audience. Myk explains that the eviction of Rhino happened on a day that many people were out of town for music festivals. The day was pouring rain, and they knew that people wouldn't be out and about. They tied a rope around the horn, [the bright red rhino horn on the corner of the building] which was our symbol for many years. In very un-Swiss-like fashion, they ripped it off. It was like the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein. It was as if to say, this is the end of the squat movement. To this day the building remains empty. All the windows are cemented, the toilets all smashed. We had accumulated about a quarter million dollars from monthly rents. We used the money to pay for maintenance, renovations, and lawyers to defend our case in court. We had such a strong sense of community, and support from the local leftwing political groups that we won in court every time. Until District Attorney Zappelli got into power, put his crosshairs on Rhino and decided, 'That's it.' And, since we had our



money in a post office account that is run by the Swiss government, they seized all of our assets overnight. The day after we were evicted, they declared that we were no longer a legal association. So we couldn't defend ourselves or look for another house. Essentially, people were out on the street. It was a horrible end to a beautiful scene. We had many performance spaces, including one that was important in the experimental music scene in Europe. We housed artists coming through the city doing performances. We had a bistro where people exchanged ideas. It was a thriving cultural center.

The notion of occupying buildings as an alternative lifestyle seems alien in the United States. It is possible to do. People have this image of squatters as these scumbag degenerates, or that they are just all full of anarchist punks. That is not at all what I experienced at Rhino in Geneva. Each squat in Geneva had its own atmosphere. There were some that were

students, and very low key, some that were real anarchists. We were considered kind of the mothership of the squat movement, and were much more politicized. We were in kind of a ritzy neighborhood, maybe the equivalent of Park Avenue. We were really like a thorn in the neighborhood's side. We were totally out of place. There was something really nice about that too. Still it was probably one of the reasons why it didn't survive. 18 years is still pretty good. We had a chance to buy the building at one point, but we didn't act fast enough. Other squats transformed their situation, and with the help of the city bought their property and continue to exist today.

[Leonard Abrams serves cocktails. There is a pause... Then Michel resumes, talking about the Rote Flora in Hamburg – see section on Germany]

"Zurich Squat Dinner,"
from Fly's sketchbook
(1998)

School of Walls and Space, Copenhagen

Two artists from Copenhagen, Tine and Joen, presented at the “University of Trash” exhibition at Sculpture Center, Queens, NY on 15 May 2009. They are working with Nils Norman. They described the occupation last year of a road in Copenhagen... This is a partial transcript of their talk.

The occupation began with a demonstration on 31 May 2008, setting out from the University of Copenhagen and ending at this road, a street running alongside Christiania, the free town near central Copenhagen that was squatted in the 1970s.

There was a lot of building materials there. The slogan of the demonstration was “They tear down, we build up.” It was mentioned in the flyer that when the buildup was completed, it would look like an adventure playground.

At the time the occupation took place, Christiania was under a lot of pressure from the right-wing government to normalize their autonomous status. Negotiations were going on. Instead of talking through lawyers, we wanted to expand the idea of Christiania

After the battle over the Youth House [sale and eviction of the Ungdomshuset] two years ago, there were many occupations of buildings in Copenhagen. But they were all evicted after a short time. They were actions for the sake of action. We thought this would be just another of those kind of actions.

The first day we built and built a house with just a few nails and a stone. The next day it was not taken down, so we came back with tools and built some more. We just stayed there from then on.

The street is in bad shape. Because it only goes to Christiania, the municipality doesn't want to put any money into maintaining it.

On the first day concrete blockades were built to force the cars to drive slower. Many slogans

were posted on the road. This is one: “Free one street and the rest will follow.”

As soon as we realized that this could be a longer occupation, we began to hold meetings so everyone could participate. Our assemblies included activists, homeless people, young

people who had run away from home, a wide range of people, which is unusual for Copenhagen. We had to learn, how do we talk to each other? How do these assemblies take place?

We never had a name. There was no fixed entity, no one group, but many different people coming together to create

what became a new society. We didn't have a fixed strategy about talking to the press. Everyone could say what they wanted. The press and the city were confused.

People were coming in caravans [trailers] to set up camp, and coming to build shelters as we did. The road runs along the waterfront. There wasn't enough space on the land, so we decided to build on the water also.

We bought old plastic chemical tanks, and built on them. The idea was that when an eviction happened we could float into the channels of Copenhagen and be this separate society.

About 50 building projects were going on, all with recycled materials.

Construction companies would pass by and drop off materials so we could continue to build.

Meetings were concerned with practical problems.

There was a waste problem, what to do with the piss and shit.

There were teams out scouring the city for materials at building sites and demolitions. There



was a constant hunger for materials. It became a utopian kind of thing, of city planning with no master plan -- no direct goals, but everything developed on the spot according to our needs.

We had a kitchen, where people would drop off food they had dumpster dived.

Christiania supported us with water and electricity and toilets. And they came to our parties and kitchens. It was something different, but it was sometimes melting together in a strange way.

There are expensive houses across the water. I think we had a better view than they did.

There were also some rare birds, so we had to be careful of the wildlife.

This part of Copenhagen was like being in the country. When we would go into the city to do errands we would become scared, and have to rush back to our city as soon as possible.

Naivete played a big role. We didn't think about an eviction. Everything happened in the here and now. I got so involved with it that I forgot about the real world.

For a long time we didn't hear anything. The land we were on was owned by three different state authorities.

We heard that they were having really long meetings about what to do with us, who should be responsible for taking it down.

It was the most hippie happy action I have ever been a part of. It became this surreal utopian society.

There were about 100 or 150 people involved. But it fluctuated. Houses were collective. People came from other countries, and would stay for a while in tents or campers. This was a circus that came to do a performance. People could see that this was something special, so they came to do events there.

One day we woke up, and there was white notes everywhere, on everything. They were from the municipality, saying that we should be out from there within a week. It was on everything. After six weeks, these three offices had finally agreed on what to do. After all this time, a lot of people had seen what we were doing, including the

press. A lot of city planners and architects passed by to see what we were doing. The police of course. After a week or so there was a second note all over the place again. In our meeting we had to decide how to respond, how to react to this. Should we defend it? Should we move all the moveable houses? What should the people in caravans do? Different groups had different strategies. Our collective had two different houses, the little one we slept in and another on the water. We thought about moving the floating housing.

Parallel to our project there was an art project that took place in another part of Copenhagen near the channels. It was part of the [quaternary celebration about] the [future of Copenhagen.] And there was this group which had what they called the Harbor Laboratory. It was on the site where a building would be built by the star architect Rem Koolhaas, intended to regenerate the whole area. This project was contested, since activists were fighting against this building. The



slogan of this art project was, "Everyone can use the harbor." And naturally we came to ask, Can we come by with our houses and use the harbor? And the answer was no. The whole aesthetic of the project was the same as ours. But this was happening parallel.

We should mention also "Get Lost," which was another strange exhibition project. Both these projects were sponsored by this huge real estate firm. Get Lost appeared after a few weeks at the

end of the street where we were. They were not living there as we did, but they were building houseboats as well. They had platforms in the water and everything, and they brought in a lot of really expensive materials. On all of them they had stamped "Get Lost." It was kind of nasty to be a part of this action, and then experiencing within the occupation this attempt to use our action.

This same real estate firm [Real Dana] had offered some time ago to convert Christiania into a fund, to eliminate this collective ownership. On paper it looked like they were saving Christiania, but in reality it was just a scam.

On the day that they were going to take the houses down we made this demonstration with a party afterwards to ensure that there would be a lot of people there. Usually in Copenhagen when we have a demonstration we have a sound system. Some people decided to make a floating sound system that would follow the demonstration. There was also this boat with a flag, "We do it ourselves." There was also a bar there, from some months before. They had concerts there. I think maybe it was from this small group of people that it all came out from. So the 15th of July, very early in the morning, the police came and blocked one end of the street. They were very friendly. They just knocked on each house and said, The fun is over, it's time to leave. I think they even offered breakfast. We didn't want to use violence to defend the place because Christiania was our neighbor, and it wouldn't be good timing for a riot just outside of its gates. The police ended up smashing everything and driving away with the materials. It took them only eight hours. They did a really good job cleaning up so there was not a nail left on the site. They de-historicized it, so there was no sign whatever that this had taken place. That is why we are trying to collect people's writings and create a document about what was going on, because it was quite fantastic.

We were just sitting in a cafe talking about what we got out of it. It was a small period of time different from everything else. We could create the world as we wanted it. So we bring this experience with us to the projects we are involved in now and in the future.

There have been different attempts to describe what a revolution feels like, but this is the closest I have been. It sits in the body in the same way as the eviction of the Youth House. For five days of riots after the streets around there were taken

over. These are two very different things, but connected. To imagine that things like this can actually happen -- that is very difficult in these times.

Question period:

I wonder if there was a lot of fighting going on, or if there were people who were really lazy, and went there just to hang out.

This project embraced many different people. There was of course some fighting, but it was all solved in a nice way, and we never had to throw out anyone. It was not centralized, so people could do their own things.

Q [Dara Greenwald] : Since it was so decentralized, how was it decided to do it in the first place? Also, did you find that there were gender dynamics around building stuff?

There was some discussion before. Many of the activists were connected with Christiania. The idea was to do an expansion of Christiania, or a symbol of an expansion that became a real expansion. There was a flyer going around in Copenhagen calling for this demonstration. In Copenhagen we have a strong idea of this free space, so the flyer was calling for more free spaces in Copenhagen. I didn't feel there was a particular gender dynamic at work. We were all pretty new to building.

Q: Do you feel that there were people outside of this community of Christiania who were participating? Or was it kind of insular?

[This question was asked by Nick Berzofsky of Baltimore's Participation Park who presented earlier. He explained that it was more difficult for them to reach across the cultural divide in the site they had chosen to work, Baltimore's poor black community.]

Christiania has many different people in it, including drug dealers, alcoholics, etc. They were involved. It wasn't like the activists coming out and doing something for someone else, it was like we all did this thing together.

That we didn't have any stated goals was very important for this embracing attitude that you could find there. We made the politics on the site. Everyone likes to construct things. It's a very easy thing to gather around.

Q: You had a very open atmosphere, and you were living together. Were there any sexual problems, harassment or such?

There was one example. Three people came from Norway. They were doing porn movies in nature. Fuck for Forest. They run a pay website to watch their porn, and then they buy trees. They were

doing porn movies next to our assemblies. That was really harrassing for some people. They were walking around in clothes that were showing everything. People confronted them personally and said, Can you please fuck somewhere else?

Q: Could you do this in the countryside, and not the city?

Christiania was really important here. The state is afraid of Christiania, of what will happen if they try to evict it. The press also saw us as the new Christiania, so there was a general approval of what we were doing, and the naivete that we had. Also we got all the materials from the city. We wouldn't be able to do this if we didn't have all these materials floating everywhere because of this neoliberal boom.

Q [Nils Norman]: For me it was really a statement about gentrification which was then and still is in a state of rapid acceleration. I don't know if that would make any sense in a rural context.

Q [James Trimarco]: If the cops hadn't shut it down, how do you think the project could have been sustained?

The first houses were only shacks. Then they became more carefully built. In the winter, Copenhagen is cold. So I think it would have evolved organically.

Q: Since you are artists in the art school, in your experience how does art and activism go together?

I didn't see it as an art project. I just did it because it was fun. Normally in my [art] practice I question everything. This was just something we did. Some of the signs were beautiful. Most of the people in our house were art students, so it was of course mixed in together. But I never thought of it as an art project. We never exhibited anything from it, or used it in an art context. I saw it as a living experiment more than an action. It started out as an action, but it became a living experiment

Q [Michael Cataldi]: A friend of mine from Baltimore who is a labor organizer asked me, Why do you want to talk about activist and organizing projects that involve artists? Why don't you talk about activist and organizing projects that involve plumbers? To me it seemed important to break down the distinction between artist and plumber, between activist project and art project, and living experiment.

Q [Heather Rogers]: What do you think about this being presented in an art context, in the Sculpture Center?

I just presented this at an activist conference in Copenhagen called "Undoing the City" which is very similar to the "City from Below" [conference in April in Baltimore].

For me it doesn't matter where it is presented. It is just important to tell about our experiences.

Undoing the City was a conference [in early May 09] in Copenhagen, and we had three themes: gentrification, racism in public space, and right to the city. It was initiated by a collective called Openhagen.net. It is a website where there is a lot of research and writing about urban issues. We asked if you could undo the city, how would you imagine that to be? We had four days of seminars, walks in the city, guided walks, events and happenings, parties and so on. We did an action where we surveilled the police for 24 hours, because they are right now doing a very racist surveillance of immigrant groups in Copenhagen. So we were in a neighborhood where this is happening for 24 hours recording everything they did. And they really hated us for this. We took over a street for three hours. We call it pirate parties. You get a message and you have to be there at a certain hour, and we have a sound system and we are there until the police break it up. The whole street was covered in graffiti, and some looting happened. There was not really much news that day, so it was blown up very big on the news. It was strange, with the police standing by and doing nothing. The next day people were very angry about that. Since we have been here there has been a lot of writing about this. Some writers mention the festival and the problem of gentrification, so it seems we gained a lot from this festival. But these images of rioting are the ones that will be related to the festival. Some of the news writers are analyzing the graffiti, trying to find out why these youth are being so destructive. One says, "We don't mean to harm you, but capitalism is boring."

Q: Can this be a model for the coming catastrophes of climate change, where refugees will need to build their own cities?

That is a very good question. How do we involve more people, to make this kind of activity more sustainable?

Photos: housebuilding from Christianias Kulturforening web page, photos probably by Nils Vest; vanguard of Ungdomshuset demonstration, from Wikipedia

The House Magic: BFC project continues as a guest of the University of Trash at the Sculpture Center in Queens, New York (May 10-August 3, 2009).

The University of Trash is a project by Michael Cataldi and Nils Norman. It is a platform-type exhibition, with an extensive series of related workshops, talks, concerts, and film screenings. "Drawing from utopian ideals and radical urban projects undertaken since the 1960s, the artists will create an installation that

functions as a temporary, makeshift University – hosting courses, lectures, presentations, and workshops.

"A Free Skool program will operate within the University, offering the public the opportunity to propose their own courses - open and free for all who sign up and attend throughout the duration of the exhibition."

**coming in the next issue of the zine catalogue of
"House Magic: Bureau of Foreign Correspondence"
more social center compilations
a conversation about Barcelona with Emily Piper Foreman and
Marina Monsonis
a conversation about Dada in Zurich with Olga Mazurkiewicz
texts on communal living
a talk by Rebecca Zorach on Christiania
radio broadcasts from the University of Trash
and much more
Look for it in September 2009**

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"House Magic" is the first step in an ongoing project which invites public participation to share and synthesize the stories and lessons of the global social center movement.

you can follow the further development of the HM:BFC project online::
"House Magic: BFC" wiki – www.housemagic.info
blog of the project, called "Occupations and Properties" -- <http://occupprop.blogspot.com>

CREDITS:

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HM:BFC logo by Suck Zoo Han
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opening of the House Magic:
BFC show as part of the
University of Trash, May 10,
2009